THE BIG BARN

WALTER D. EDMONDS

Harvard College
Library

PS
3509
.D564B5

Lord.

UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG
LIBRARY
DISCARDED

THE BIG BARN

THE BIG BARN

3509
D564

By

WALTER D. EDMONDS

Author of "Rome Haul"

An Atlantic Monthly Press Book

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1930

PZ 1928.8
ALA 1928.18
A
HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE BEQUEST OF
MRS. [illegible] LORD
1942

Copyright, 1930,
BY WALTER D. EDMONDS

All rights reserved

Published September, 1930

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS BOOKS
ARE PUBLISHED BY
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

For Eleanor

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/bigbarn0000walt

CONTENTS

I	Site of the Barn	3
II	The Arrival of the Bride	24
III	Breaking Ground	49
IV	Ralph's Birthday	79
V	Bascom	96
VI	Henry	113
VII	The Execution of a Dog	123
VIII	The Berry Pickers	145
IX	Into Eden Garden	161
X	Winter in the Valley	178
XI	The River Breaks	201
XII	Beginning of War	209
XIII	Out of Eden Garden	247
XIV	Determination of the Family	253
XV	The Barn Party	313
XVI	Evensong	330

THE BIG BARN

I

SITE OF THE BARN

1

In 1860, an ant on its spring marching came upon the mountain of his cowhide boot. For a while it considered the phenomenon, its horns erect. Then it laid hold with its hands and began to climb. It went slowly, using the crossed laces as a ladder until it reached the smooth curve of the doeskin breeches over the great knee. There it paused once more to gain its breath. Then, gathering itself, it made a rush to gain the summit, and saw the whole man before it, the heavy chest rising and falling evenly in sleep. The ant stayed there marveling to itself with its hands.

The old man sat erect against the high back of an oaken chair, his arms on the wooden arms, his big, red-knuckled hands grasping the wooden claws. The verandah roof let in the full sunlight on his black coat and scarlet waistcoat, but kept his massive grey head in shadow. It was a powerful face, smooth-shaven, flushed an even red from more than sixty years of wind and winter, the cheeks still full, the nose arching and proud. The wide mouth and heavy chin were firm even in sleep.

The ant remained to rest itself while the black brows changed their curve, as if at hidden thought. It had never seen old Wilder before; it had no fear of an old man dozing. Yet even though he dozed, there was an air of alertness about his big body. The deep-sprung chest was erect and the feet stood flat upon the floor, ready to grip it when he rose. The controlled quiet of his sleep before the silent shadowed house made him immensely threatening. At the stir of a grass blade, his whole

two hundred pounds might have sprung to their full height.

The late afternoon sun of mid-April, which had found out the old man and the ant, was still high enough to fill the deep Black River Valley. A slight mistiness hung over the valley floor, dimming the little cluster of the village roofs and the white thunder of the High Falls at their back porch steps; and only here and there the sun picked out objects clearly: the three-armed bridge above the falls, spanning the Black and then the Moose River and stretching an arm to the point of land between them; the road from Rome, and Utica, and the open land southward, a pale dusty line, coming down the three hills from the high western plateau through cups of deep blue shadow; the gilt cross of the little Forest Church among its surrounding maples; the edge of the unbroken wilderness; and, on the broad porch of the incongruously handsome lime-stone house, the red waistcoat of the old man, and the ant upon his knee admiring him.

More than forty years before he had come into the valley with his father, who had been land agent for the Courtney Purchase. Little by little, first together, then he alone, they had bought up timberland, until now he owned a hundred thousand acres of the finest timber stretching from his farm south and eastward up the rivers. He held mortgages on half the farms along the valley, ten miles in each direction; he owned the water power on the creeks and the great red mill beside the falls. Of plain Scotch and English stock, he and his father had come into this valley and by a grim and ruthless sort of industry had made it theirs.

His wife and he had talked for many years about their future. A little thing, half a man's weight, she had always had her place in everything he did. Together they had watched the fortune grow, and when the time came to decide where they should go, they had agreed to stay here in the land they had created. It belonged to them, and they felt the desire for making tangible upon it the result of their long labor.

He had built her this house; it had no counterpart north of the Mohawk Valley. Sixty thousand dollars had gone into it. The stone had been quarried seven miles away in Collinsville

across the river. He had hired an architect to build it in a French style, and after his last term in the Assembly they had come back to live here. That year she had died. . . .

The heavy black brows came down suddenly. Anger and dismay mingled in the frown, and the line of the mouth softened. He made no movement, but the ant upon his knee reared up its head at what its hands had felt. The thin eyelids had lifted and the eyes were peering forth. They were bold, so dark that they looked black. They roved the valley.

From the foot of the verandah, beyond the drive, the lawn stretched to the main road. Here and there the sun picked out the bright green of new grass springing through the sopping sod. The shadows of the elms and the great gaunt pines that had felt the first plough break ground over their roots five years before stretched towards him. From the narrow, white-framed windows at his back no sound came; the house seemed sleeping in the afternoon hush.

A continual muttering from the falls crawled towards him through the hazy air; he had had a view of them cleared through the trees and he could see their white thunder on his left. To the right his eyes showed him the valley widening, the dark curve of the river with a steamer coming up and a line of canal boats sluggishly following. He watched them nosing into the wharf and entering the lock one by one for their long hauls southward. He had been one of the commissioners to dig out that canal; he himself had built the river steamer; the first one he had built had blown to flinders and taken the cockeyed engineer up with it, and all the man had got was a bloody nose. But he had been more careful with this second boat. Still dozy, the old man grinned.

His eyes fell to his knee and became aware of the presence of the ant.

"Hullo, there." His voice was heavy, harsh, and seemed to come from a great depth. "You 're out early. Where are you going to?"

The ant stroked its horns with its hands in a final gesture, turned slowly round, climbed down the laced boot, and went on with its spring marching. When it got to the corner of the

verandah it came face to face with its shadow and walked behind it until it reached the steps. There the shadow vanished; and the ant went down alone to disappear finally in the grass.

For several minutes the old man stared after the ant. He still sat motionless, his hands clasping the arms of the chair. Then his eyes came back to the steamboat on the river. A tuft of white opened beside the smokestack and a black cloud issued from its mouth as the engineer banked the fire. Suddenly the old man rose.

On his feet, his full size became apparent; his shoulders hunched slightly forward, his feet stood a little apart, and his legs showed thick and hard against his trousers. It was only when he went into the house that his age showed in the weariness of his walk.

As he opened the door his lips drew down slightly with distaste for the bustle he heard about him. Two countrywomen in limp damp gingham dresses were house-cleaning the hall — one waxing the stairs on the left, the other on a chair polishing the silver Wilder shield his father had had made in Germany. Overhead sounded the tread of hurrying women, the rasp of brooms, a faint drone of voices.

"The house was n't dirty anyway," he grunted savagely to himself. The woman on the stairs looked up.

"Nance wanted to see you, Mr. Wilder."

"Where is she?"

The woman turned and without rising from her knees called shrilly, "Nance! Nance!"

At the cry, a silence entered the whole house. Then from the attic a sharp woman's voice answered, "Yeanh?"

"Here 's Mr. Wilder," cried the woman.

At the name, the sounds of cleaning were resumed as suddenly as they had been stopped. The old man waiting in the hall snorted, turned his back on the two women, and jammed his hands into his hip pockets.

Almost immediately he heard quick steps coming along the hall from the back stairs, and he turned again to see an old woman coming towards him.

In the dusky hall she showed him only a thin sharp face, grey hair, and a pair of welted hands; but her thin body stood straight, and when she turned her face to the light, there gleamed in her eyes a strange shade of bright mahogany-brown. With the lines round them dimmed in the hall they looked like the eyes of a woman of twenty-five. Just now they were afire. The old man noticed that, and said gruffly, "What are you doing up here in the house, Nance?"

"Come in here."

She led the way into the small parlor and closed the door. He trudged after her and looked down at her while she blazed out.

"I know you said for me not to come up and tangle with that woman, but I come just the same. I 've worked for you long enough not to stand for her pestering Joan any more."

"What 's Mrs. Brinley been doing to Joan, now?" He scowled. Meeting his stare, the old woman recognized its bleakness and lowered her voice.

"She ain't really been doing anything *to* her, Ralph. Only Joan said you said to fix the best room for Henry and the girl, and Mrs. Brinley says she 's planned to fix that one on the second floor back with the painted black dresser. I don't care where you put Henry and the girl. But it ain't good for Joan. That woman will drive her clean crazy yet."

A slow flush of color reddened the old man's cheeks. He grasped the door knob. "That woman 's always trying to go against my orders. He 's oldest boy and he 's got a right to the best room, him and his wife. I 'm sick of her."

Suddenly he remembered the old servant's presence.

"Get back to the farmhouse, and if you come up here again I 'll put a belt across you."

Nance stared at him.

"You would n't dast do that to me, Ralph." Her anger got the better of her again. "If it had been Bascom I 'd have settled with her myself afore I seen you."

"Henry 's got just as much right around here as Bascom," the old man growled, "even if you did nurse Bascom instead. Where 's Mrs. Brinley?"

The woman who was polishing the shield industriously in the selfsame spot which had occupied her when Ralph entered the hall said at once, "In the kitchen, Mr. Wilder."

Nance watched him tramp down the hall. She grinned suddenly, saw the two women watching her with contemptuous eyes.

"Jealous!" She sniffed, raised her chin a trifle, and marched out of the hall, her back cold with dignity. A slight breeze caught her skirts in the doorway and lifted them to show her bare old feet in carpet slippers. She heard the women snicker and slammed the door angrily.

The old man burst into the kitchen and shouted, "Mrs. Brinley!"

He got no answer, and for an instant he stood still, staring at the big new iron stove. Then, as he listened, his eyes moved swiftly from door to door, and a sudden sly expression entered them. He had caught the sound of skirts beyond the pantry door.

He drew a deep breath and lifted his chin and shouted at the top of his lungs, "Mrs. Brinley, you come here!" It was the kind of roar he would have given on a log drive, and his head cocked a bit to one side to appreciate the stillness that followed on its echoes. He had caught a slight gasp in the pantry, and he grinned. His wife had got Mrs. Brinley the year before she died, to governess the girls, and there were times when he thought she was trying to governess him with her fine ways. She stood up for a refined widow, but the title had been considered one of courtesy. She had run his house for ten years, enjoying absolute command. With the two oldest girls married and gone and no one left but the boys and poor Joan, he had needed someone.

In the silence, his eyes swept the kitchen and fell on the one chair. With two heavy steps he crossed to it and sat down. There was still no answer, and in a moment he began to grow angry again. It sounded in his voice.

"Mrs. Brinley, come out of that pantry. I want to talk to you."

Instantly the door opened, and the housekeeper entered.

She was a middle-aged woman, tall and rather thin, with a smooth, expressionless face. Her black dress was faultlessly in order, as was her hair, which she wore parted straight up the middle and fussed over the ears, with three curls on the right side of her neck, just touching the shoulders. It was ash blond, and would have been beautiful had there been more color in her eyes. At mere sight of her he wanted to discharge her, but just now he wanted his house in order, and he met her with complete dignity, offering no reference to his shouts.

"What is it, Mr. Wilder?"

He said, without rising, "I hear you 're putting Henry and his wife in the back bedroom. I thought I explained they were to have the best one off the parlor."

A slight flush rose in her cheeks. Her thin upper lip lifted slightly and she caught her lower for an instant in her teeth.

"Who said that?"

He ignored the question.

"Henry 's my oldest son and he 's bringing back his wife. They 're to have the best room, Mrs. Brinley. Will you see to it at once?"

Her question still hung on her lips, but she checked it and said, "Very well, Mr. Wilder," and turned to the door.

"Where 's Joan?"

Her eyes narrowed. "I saw her going down to the deer park. It 's against my orders, too. She gets harder every day to manage." She saw something in his face. "You know it is n't safe for her."

He grunted. "I 'll look her up."

He watched her pass through the door. Lace on her collar and a lace cap! When she had gone, he got up, went into the hall for his hat and stick, and without looking at the cleaning woman passed out of the house.

He spanked the gravel in the drive with the end of his stick and grinned as he went toward the deer park. He had done it well, he said to himself.

He found his daughter on the bridge he had built over the park. A narrow glen, half a mile long, that edged the meadows

on the south had been enclosed with an eight-foot rail fence, and across the narrowest part he had built a rustic bridge. A bench had been constructed in the rails in the middle of the bridge, where he came to sit at times to watch the young bucks in the rutting season testing out old Gregory.

A bar of sunlight slanted through the high pine boughs to the bench where a girl knelt staring down into the dusk of the ravine. At the sound of his tread, she looked up. Unlike her departed sisters, she had been cast in her father's heavy mould. She had big hands, clumsy on a girl, and coarse black hair; but her grey eyes in her broad freckled face were timid.

"Hello, Joan, what are you doing?"

His whole manner had changed, and he put an arm over her shoulders and knelt beside her on the bench. She smiled, and for an instant her face brightened.

"I was watching Gregory."

He looked down. A big buck was standing in the cowslip leaves beside the little brook. His horns were still lumps on his head, but even so he looked big for a Virginia deer. He met the old man's gaze now and looked away.

"Hi, Greg."

Ralph and the buck had always mistrusted each other, and each respected the other's strength. Six winters before, the old man had found the buck in a drift half a mile from the house, too weak to fight, and had carried him to the park, and the deer had not forgotten.

"He 'd like to get me down," said the old man.

His daughter grinned back at him.

"Don't let him, Father."

He grunted and turned away and sat down.

"I 've seen to Mrs. Brinley," he said, " so don't worry about the room."

She sat beside him.

"When will they get here, Father?"

"I don't know. About eight, I guess."

"I 'm glad you had her change the room." Her plain face was troubled, and she stared up against the bar of sunlight, a little water in her eyes.

"What 's the matter, Joan?" His voice was softer. At times in the girl's expression he caught an odd resemblance to her mother.

"Do you think she 'll like me?"

"Who — Rose?"

"Yes."

"Why, yes, why should n't she?"

"Henry does n't."

"Henry 's a fool," growled the old man.

"Do you think she 'll live here all the time?"

He grunted. "Henry can't earn his living. He never learned anything but Latin and books all his life. And I won't give him money to go away."

He poked the bridge floor with the end of his stick, then leaned forward and rested his chin on his hands. Brooding side by side, he and his youngest daughter were very much alike now.

"Even if he don't there 'll be you and me, Joan. We like the farm. It 's funny the boys don't. Henry 's too much of a fool. But Bascom ought to, even if he is wild. I hope he 's got sense enough to keep out of trouble for a while."

"Bascom 's so good to me."

They were silent for some time. Then the old man said, "Better get back, Joan. Put on a pretty dress. We want to look nice. Henry 's had sense enough to marry, anyway, and we want to start the girl right."

"Do you think she 's pretty?"

"I 've not seen her since she was a little bit of a girl, Joan, before her father moved back to Boston. But he was a good enough man for a minister."

Joan's eyes wandered. "I wonder if she 'll like it here."

Something rumbled in the old man's chest.

"I might scare her, rough her too much," he admitted; "but her mother came out of those Salem families." He laughed. "They live high there. She had an uncle said a man wasn't a gentleman that did n't die by thirty-six. Showed he knew how to live, to die that way."

Joan stared.

"He did." The old man nodded. "I guess it 's been kind of hard on Rose's mother. She never put much stock in religion, as I remember. It beats all why she married him. She 's had to dress the children on what her sisters send her. And I 'll bet sometimes it 's a tight squeeze just getting the food. You see, to that kind of a family, when it comes to marrying, any one of God's lambs looks black."

He ruminated.

"I should think the girl 'd be glad getting out of there."

He got to his feet.

"Well," he said, "I 've fixed up everything around the house. I 'd better get down to the farm and see Pete." His face lost the slight sadness and fired with energy. He squared his shoulders and his chin lifted. "Losing that barn was not such a bad thing maybe. It 's time I fixed for a real dairy now Henry 's settling down."

He forgot for the moment Henry's attitude toward farming, and Joan, thinking timidly about her new sister-in-law, did not remind him.

He took the drive round the house. As he passed under the *porte-cochère* he caught a glimpse of Parchal Smith, the manservant, stealing a swallow of Madeira, but he merely grinned and stooped for some pebbles and threw them against the panes. The sallow face turned towards him, bewilderment in the stale eyes. Then it ducked as though it had been clubbed. The old man jammed his hands into his pockets and went on chuckling.

He followed the drive under the high grove until he came to the carriage house. A thin, white bitch, part foxhound, part mastiff, part greyhound, was stretched out in the door. She was the last of those dogs Joseph Bonaparte, the King of Spain, had brought forty years before to hunt wolves on his Diana Park. She and Ralph regarded each other for an instant before she got lazily from his path. "Hi, Juno," he said, and she acknowledged the greeting with drooping ears. The bitch had no affection for anyone but Bascom, but he patted her ugly head because he liked to see that she feared him.

He thought of going into the barn, but then he told himself that he had n't time. So he called, "George!"

A little man with a crooked shoulder and a limp came forth from the harness room, a saddle on one arm.

"How 's the colt, George?"

The coachman took a straw from his teeth and spat.

"Getting better. Be all right in a couple of days."

"What are you saddling for?"

"Bascom going out."

"When?"

"Right off. He 's taking Belle."

The old man grunted, turned back to the drive.

"I 'll stop that," he growled. "Clearing out like that to-night."

The hound was working the air with her nose, her tail thumping the planks. A young man in riding boots and a blue coat came eagerly along the drive. He was as tall as Ralph, but his hair was a bright nut-brown. He had clear blue eyes, his cheeks were flushed a healthy pink. The mouth over the soft beard was full-lipped and unnaturally red for a man's, curved deeply, both lips rounded and of equal thickness, and noticeably moist. When his eyes swung to the stable door they were as ardent as the hound's lifted to greet him.

A peculiar grim pride entered the father's eyes, but he shook his head slightly and his harsh voice asked, "You 'll be in to-night?"

"Late," said Bascom. "I 'm going for a ride. I 've just got in from the mill. Those timbers are good grade, but they 're too heavy to handle."

The old man scowled.

"You don't know a thing about it. If you 'd been alive to see it, you 'd know we 'd done a lot of things in this valley would 've raised your sweat. Never mind that. Be here for supper."

"Why?"

"Because I tell you. I 'm going to have Henry and his wife met properly, no matter what he thinks of us and the place."

George led out a thin clean mare of English stock, a bright dapple-grey.

Bascom grinned as he took her, and swung lightly up, and the bitch danced under the mare's chin. Leaning on his stick, Ralph waited for his son to gather up the reins.

"Go down by the bars and see the boy gets in all the young stock. Harrow won't be back till after milking."

The son flushed angrily. "I 'm in a hurry."

He met his father's stare, his eyes dropped, and he wheeled the mare toward the pasture and trotted off with the hound loping ahead. The old man grunted and took up his way along the drive. . . . The timbers were ready. Harrow was up at Cantrell's giving orders for the stone.

Ahead he could see the fields through the shade of the grove, the sun still bright on their flat length, here and there hints of green, and the tight smell of old manure rotted by the vanished snow.

The road cut diagonally across the fields, and against the hills on the far side the hogpen and the farmer's house were insignificant. When, ten years ago, he had built the barn that had burned that spring, he had thought it big enough, but then the farm had been a little thing. He had hired his farmer then, a young man sent to him from Rome, who admired cattle, and between them they had dreamed of a great dairy.

As he walked, his legs thrusting out sturdily beside the ruts, old Ralph's eyes glistened. It was queer that a young stranger like Harrow could fire him with such ideas. He had left canal life for the farm ; he had been born Tug Hill way, where he had tasted the bitterness of barren land. Ralph had seen the bitter struggles with the wilderness. To them the dairy would be more than farming.

Now that the boats moved on the canal, butter could reach Rome. It brought a higher price than cheese. They would salt it in great tubs.

To the left, trailing the edge of the flatland, came the herd, their bells striking isolated notes against the darkening sky. His broad hands knotted on the head of his stick, the old man paused to watch them come. He multiplied them by four, and

saw the dairy there — a hundred cows. They would need a barn, to hold them and their fodder, and fodder for the horses that worked for them, and the horses themselves, and the young stock and the bull. Now, of all times, was the time to begin to build.

Just ahead he saw the two men straddling the ridge of the hogpen roof. As Ralph proceeded they thrust in the last shingle and nailed it home. His shadow, stretching out farther before him with each stride, climbed the speckled roof and passed out of sight between their knees. They bent up stiffly and looked at him.

2

About sunset men were sitting round the cold belly of the stove in the post office and general store of High Falls, New York. The younger men squatted on the floor, backs to the wall, while their elders occupied the few chairs.

In the fore part of the store, a counter ran halfway down each wall. Here were medicines, and dry goods in bolts on the shelves, thread and needles, a small section for perfumes and ribbons and knickknacks that the women prided. Barrels of meal and flour were lined up along one side; lamps and dishes had their place on upper shelves, and the crude-oil tins stood together by a window. The post office took up the left-hand corner by the front window — a little cubbyhole, a relic of the days, not long past, when the mail came only once a week in summer and when it could be brought at all in winter, and the people drove to town to watch its sorting.

Beyond the two counters the stove occupied an open space as large again as the front store. On the ends of the counters high shelves had been built, partitioning off the back store into a separate room. A tangle of men's goods was hanging from the walls. Trousers, belts, suspenders, harness, axes, knives, and a great pillar of grindstones between the windows, and all coated with a fine white country dust. Here the men of the village were accustomed to sit and sort the affairs of the valley.

They wore rough homespun clothes and heavy farmer's boots. They talked in desultory snatches, for it had been hot that day and they were adjusting their thoughts to the growing feeling of spring. A vague lazy light wavered in their eyes, and from time to time one of the younger men would flex an arm or stretch his legs and yawn, or slowly close his fists, for it was the time of year when a man's hands became aware of his thoughts.

A half dusk lay on the smoke-filled air, fitting with a strange sense of comfort the mixed smells of harness oil and liniment and fresh cotton cloth, molasses and old rum. They spoke in lowered voices, with no thought now for the tense interminable winter games of checkers, and their intermittent speech barely reached the front of the store where the proprietor, Mercer, was browsing through a new advertising booklet of Brandreth Pills.

"I wonder what Wilder aims to do with all them timbers he 's been sawing out."

"To the mill?"

"Yeanh. They 're fourteen inches through and piled higher than a man's head. There 's some eighteeners, too big for the saws to carry, so they adzed them out by hand."

They let the idea wander. Pretty soon another said, "Henry 's coming back to-night, him and his wife."

"Think of a man going all the way to Boston just to get married!"

Again there was a silence. After a while one brought them back to Wilder.

"I wonder what old Ralph 's up to. There 's them timbers; and now he 's got an order into Collinsville on Cantrell's Quarry."

"Yeanh?"

"Yeanh. I seen Dan Harrow this afternoon. Wilder 'd sent him up to see the stone. He 's had Pete and Leo over there this afternoon, too."

The darkness accumulated by slow degrees. A fly, which the heat had brought to life before her time, suffered a burst of panic on discovering that she must experience the dark alone.

Her frantic buzzing caught the men's attention and they watched her beating herself against the windowpane. Their scrutiny was as casual as their speech had been and more impersonal. Even when a spider, with crafty enterprise, began to spin a web, they made no move. But an atmosphere of philosophic speculation entered the room.

A young man, whose open face showed a sudden bitter tension, cleared his throat harshly.

"Likely," he said, "Ralph 's found that thundering big house ain't good enough to suit him. What matter if he built it just a year ago? He 's got enough money he took out of poor folks' pockets to build him another any time he wants."

The tone of anger jarred the placidity, and, feeling it, the young man got up and went over to the windows. They stared at his back a while, and then past the window glass.

They could see the Black River below them, the broken water shining in the evening light, and to the right they had a view of the High Falls over which thundered the full spring flow from the combined rivers. They had a sight of the bridge crossing each stream, and glimpses also of the road running under the trees on the farther shore. There was no sign of the railroad then, but just below them the canal let into the river through a lock, opening to freight down river north to Carthage.

In the silence they watched the fly zooming over the young man's head. The oldest member of the group shifted his feet irritably on the rail of the stove.

"Set down, can't ye, Samuel? You 're always a-getting up or making some kind of a fuss. A man can't hardly set here and think with you around."

Another of the older men broke in, "Leave him be, Uncle George. Most likely you was that way once."

Uncle George shoved his chin down on the collar of his shirt, spreading his white beard out fan-shaped, and his thin old eyelids drooped.

"If I was," he growled, "it was that long ago there ain't any of you can recollect it. I was living into this town afore the Frenchies left. I 'd been living here ten year afore old

Bascom Wilder himself got a job with Courtney and begun cutting out his money. Both dead and gone (God rest 'em). There was n't only woods and beaver flies for meadows, and all we growed was cattle hides to sell in Rome. Don't you tell me what I was or was n't, Joe."

"I did n't have no idee of doing that," said Joe placatingly.

But the old man drew a deep breath and his watery eyes went staring through the harness on the wall.

"I remember how we took hides down to Rome. In summer we could n't have the time, trying to clear the land and get our needful food. But after frost we 'd kill our cattle — we had to shoot some wild like deer — and take the hides to the tannery, and each man had his bales made up in the long shed. When February come, and the food would be getting scarce, we 'd send out a message for a sleigh train going down to Rome, and every man that had a good team 'd bring them up and we 'd load the hides, clubbing together to make up the loads. Most likely there 'd be upwards of forty teams, so many we could n't stop for sleep at any farm, but had to push right through to Rome to keep from getting froze. A day, a night, and a day."

He paused and his old eyes brightened.

"Forty teams, and when the leaders were wore out, they 'd pull up and let the next one break the trail till he dropped in behind. And when the leaders went in over their hames in a drift, the extry men went out and dug, maybe a quarter mile, with shovels. There was n't any roads, only trees felled out of the way up over the flats betwixt Tug Hill and Mohawk. And if a blizzard caught us we kept a-going. It was too cold to stop. Winter was winter in the old days, boys."

He raised his hands to look at the hard veins.

"And a day in Rome to rest the horses. Then we broke new trail, most probably, all the way back again, bringing edibles to last till spring."

A heavy silence followed his voice.

"You young fellers have n't got any real idee," said the old man, again. "Us farmers had n't even farms. It was only them with money could make money — like old Bascom Wilder.

A regular snort of an old man, but he 'd help a man in trouble. He was the old breed, Bascom was, and Ralph 's like him. They 'd got the real idee. You say Ralph 's cockeyed building such a house, but you don't know what it is. You did n't see the old days here. Why, you boys don't know nothing, nothing at all."

He relapsed into silence. The others respected him, till suddenly Samuel at the window said, "There comes Bascom."

A couple of the younger men got up and stepped to the window. They could see the rider now and then between the trees, and once the sunlight put a spark of silver on the horse's bits. He passed out of sight for a few minutes before, craning their necks, they saw him come out on the bridge.

"He 's riding his dapple mare."

"That horse has got too much air underneath to suit my notion of a horse."

"He 's got his Bonaparte bitch with him too."

Uncle George lifted his old head.

"Sounds like old Bascom," he said.

The young men paid him no attention, but Samuel clenched his fists.

"I 'll bet he 's out helling again."

"Yeanh," said another, "he 's hunting Driscoll's woman now."

"Driscoll," said Uncle George, musing. "He 's settled south, down Leyden way."

He went on to himself, an old man telling familiar information: "Old Bascom had a notion for his ma. He did n't close the mortgage on their place until old Driscoll raised a fuss about his wife, and started talking big. Old Bascom went right down in winter in his cutter with his black pacer — I remember him going through town. He got pneumonia in the house there and he died there, and Ralph has let the mortgage run. And now young Bascom 's chasing young Driscoll's woman."

His head swayed from side to side. He did not notice the others' inattention.

Beyond the door they heard a horse come to a stop, and Bascom strode in, his red mouth smiling.

"Evening," he said to the storekeeper. "How are you, Uncle George?"

"Pretty good, Bascom. Good enough to tell these young fellers things." He chuckled. "How 's things to home?"

"We 're expecting Henry back," said Bascom. "You 'll have to look the bride over."

"Yeanh," said the old man. "Your Grampa Bascom used to say I had the eye."

He winked one slowly, and chuckled again.

Bascom entered into quiet talk with the storekeeper, made a purchase, and went out. They saw the dog wag her tail to greet him and lift her dark ardent eyes. He dropped a hand to her head, then swung on to the dappled mare and was gone.

"Garters!" exclaimed Samuel. "Fancy garters for a girl!"

He scowled.

"Where 's Driscoll?"

"He 's in to-day with his big wagon. Munn 's putting on new tires for him to-morrow," said Mercer. He began lighting the store's three lamps. A smell of hot oil mingled with the odor of harness and liniment and stale tobacco, and the men's faces, red from wind and sun, appeared from the shadow by the stove.

"By God, I 'm going to talk to Driscoll!"

For a moment no one spoke, and they heard the fly about the lamp. Uncle George raised his eyes to watch it.

"It 's having quite a time butting around among all these new ideas. You 'd better set down again, Samuel, and watch that fly a spell afore you see Driscoll. I calculate he 'll handle things to suit himself when the time comes. But there 's never no sense in pushing time too close."

The young man looked down at the old; hot blood reddened his face; and after an instant his eyes fell to the crooked old hand with its welted veins, and he sat down.

"Who owns the mortgage on your farm?"

"Old Wilder."

"Him. Yeanh," Uncle George's voice dropped. "You ain't been here so long, Samuel. Old Ralph 's like his pa, he 's

taken what he wants and made a lot of money. There ain't anyone can tell him what to do. He 's worked for what he 's got and we 've tailed in. He got this canal and he 's fixed the river for boats. But his boys ain't done anything and they won't have to. I don't hold they 're good boys, Samuel, but if you come acrost them you 'll find yourself coming acrost the old man, and then he 's a devil. Stop and think about it."

Mercer and one or two of the others nodded soberly.

"That 's right."

"He owns the town, Samuel, but if you leave him be, he 'll leave you be. Cripus! Driscoll's woman ain't the first he 's been after!"

"He ought to be shot," said the young man.

Uncle George swung his beard from side to side.

"Somebody maybe will some day, but that don't mean it ought to be you."

The fly retreated to the window where the spider was finishing his web. Their heads turned from it as one man's when the door swung open.

"It 's Pete and Leo."

A little red-haired man in black trousers too big round the waist stepped forward quickly to the centre of the floor, and his brown eyes roved from face to face. He was followed by a stout man of middle age, whose hat, pushed back, let his tousled hair fall forward on his forehead. His round cheeks were smooth and pink and curved to a small serious mouth; and he stared straight ahead out of pale puzzled eyes.

"Leo," said the little man, "you set down that box over in the corner. Better see if the kittens are there first."

Leo went to the corner, looked conscientiously for kittens, and set down the carpenter's chest he was carrying.

"All right," said Pete. "Now you can go home or set here or do what you 're a-mind to till five o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Yeanh," said Leo, and after a moment's reflection he sat down on the chest.

"Where 've you been all day, Pete?" Uncle George asked.

"Over to Ralph's. Me and Leo has been shingle-patching the hogpen."

He went over to the rum keg and mixed himself a mug of strap, then returned to the stove, where he took a chair in the middle of the circle.

"What 's going on over there?"

A sparkle came into the little man's eyes.

"Me and Leo 'd just picked up our tools when I seen old Ralph coming acrost the meadow from the big house, did n't I, Leo?"

"Yeanh."

"He walked right bang down to the edge of the rise over the brook, and he says, 'Pete, here 's where I aim to build a barn.' 'Agin the rise?' says I. 'Agin the rise, Pete,' he says. 'It 'll commence here and run as far 's that skunk cabbage down there beyond that stone.' I took a look, and I says, 'Ralph, that 's going to be an almighty big barn.' And he says, 'That 's how I want it built.' So I paced it off and I made it seventy-five paces, did n't I, Leo?"

"Yeanh," said Leo.

"My paces is full ones for my stature. Seventy-five paces, two hundred and thirty feet, a mammoth barn."

Pete's eyes gleamed.

"Two hundred and thirty feet, a mammoth barn," he repeated.

"Yeanh," repeated Leo under his breath, and he too looked beyond the window with his pale, puzzled gaze. The men stirred from their silence.

"Gol," said one with a sharp intake of breath.

Another was indignant. "A barn ain't got any right to be that big. Why, it 's bigger than a church. It 's bigger than, than, than ——" There was no word big enough in his dictionary of experience.

"Jeepers! What 's he notion to put into it?"

"Stanchels for a hundred cows, winter pigpen, stalls for six team, exercise paddock and water trough in the centre of one end. A mow for hay four stories high."

His eyes came back to his hearers with a rush.

"The old bezabor stands there striking at his boots with a stick. 'That 's the barn I want to build,' he says. 'I 've been cutting out the timbers for it. I 've got Cantrell quarrying me stone. You 're the man to build it, Pete. Will you take it on?' 'Ralph,' I says, 'I 'm an honest workman. A barn that high and long and only fifty feet acrost will have an awful thrust out'ards 'gainst the wall plates.' 'Yeanh,' he says, 'I figgered so. I 'll build a double roof, a narrer one to the peak, a wider one coming out of it, and we 'll carry the top thrust down the centre timbers and tie it in with a wagon-run up under the roof. The hay can be took in on the run and pitched off on to each side — easy mowing.' "

"Gol," said the men. "There 's an idee for a barn."

The man who sought comparisons found one.

"It 'll be bigger than the Ark," he said, and a sweat of embarrassment came on his face, and he drank. But Uncle George lifted his white beard off his shirt. There was light in his watery eyes and his voice trembled.

"It 's come for me to see," he said. "It 's coming up out of the earth, for cattle and horses and big heavy crops. It 's bigger than the Ark, Ralph's building. It 's a big barn."

There was deep stillness. Each man saw with a farmer's eyes the magnitude of it. Pete saw the scarfing of great beams and a rising web of timbers; Leo felt the thump of hammers traveling up his arms, and he fingered his heavy wrists. Old George lost his hand in his beard; he saw the forest conquered and the increase of the earth. They were all silent. And the fly buzzed unnoticed for a minute; then she too was still.

II

THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRIDE

1

The sun was now so low over Tug Hill that in the valley the shadows cast by the trees merged with the dusk; but on the western upland, along which the road from Utica and Rome ran straight toward the High Falls, the eye of the sun was still visible. A red sheen marked the puddles in the ruts, and the crowns of the eastern hills and the clouds above them still carried a pink flush.

The small pastures on either side of the road were marked off by snake rail fences; but the cattle had not yet come forth from the barns. There was no sign of life on the earth; and in the sky only four crows flying one behind the other over the lip of the valley, but they flew soundlessly. The whole land seemed overhung with silence.

The passage of a coach, therefore, assumed the importance of an event. It was an old-fashioned vehicle, hanging on high leather straps that cried aloud at each lurch of the wheels. The panels showed white wood in places through the paint, and here and there had patches of mildew to which chaff yet hung after a winter's standing in a barn. On the box, the driver held the reins loosely in one hand upon his knees, his eyes staring at the sky between the horses' ears. He gave no attention to the road which the team took cleverly, easing the coach into the holes and taking it out with a careful heave into the collars. They were a livery-stable team, gaunt and tough, accustomed to the vicissitudes of travel.

Inside the coach, their bags stowed on the front seat, were sitting Henry Wilder and his bride, Rose. Both were slightly

pale after their long trip, but while he leaned deep into his corner, his eyes closed and his body inertly absorbing the swings and jolts of the old leather springs, she kept her face to the open window, only occasionally giving him a glance from her dark eyes. She had good features: a short nose, slightly tilted, a strong round chin, a rather wide mouth, brightly colored, the full lower lip meeting the short upper one in a clear curve. She sat erect, her back meeting easily the ungainly motion of the coach. With the sun lighting the shoulders of her grey jacket and touching the edge of her bonnet, the impression she gave was of youth, not waiting to be formed, but seeking a place for itself.

They had sat without speaking for nearly an hour, but now, as the horses led the coach into the right-hand set of ruts, she had a glimpse of the valley's edge.

"Henry! Look! Is this it?"

Her voice was deep and rather husky. He roused himself and leaned across her to see.

"Yes. We 're almost there now."

"I 'm glad."

She turned to him with a sudden maternal solicitude so new on her face that it hovered between comedy and tragedy.

"Are you tired, dear?"

"No. The coachman will stop to put on the chains in a minute. We can get out and look at it."

He had hardly spoken when they saw through the narrow front window the lean hams of the driver raise themselves. A loud voice shouted a fierce "Whoa!" and the coach came to a stop. At the cessation of movement the musty smell of the old leather cushions flooded the interior, and they stepped out eagerly.

The driver climbed down and stood beside them.

"Well," he said, "here we be. I 'll put on the chains. A man can't never tell when two such brutes 'll get out of his hands on hills like these'n."

He gestured widely, then bent to fasten a chain from the tree between two spokes of the nigh hind wheel. While he was occupied, the couple stepped past the horses' heads and stood

looking over the valley. It lay like a great well at their feet, the white foam of the High Falls vague in the middle of it. Points of light from house windows appeared in places like the reflections of stars, unruffled by the night breeze that was beginning to draw across the uplands.

She stood gazing over it to the hills beyond; then she looked down as far as she could see, and, as if a dizziness had taken hold of her, she put her hand through her husband's arm.

"It 's big," she said in a rather small voice.

She felt a slight answering pressure in his arm and drew in to him.

Though his hat made him appear taller, he was just of her height, and now on the edge of the darkness his face to her looked small and white.

"It 's a big valley, Rose."

"Where is the house, Henry?"

He searched a minute, then pointed out to her three narrow pieces of light.

"There, across the river, Rose."

"Way down." A slight motion like a shiver against him made him glance at her.

"Cold, dear?"

The driver's voice sounded in their ears.

"I 've tied the danged machine up so 't it can't go far no matter where them two brutes try to take it to. It 's an awful hill, ma'am. You 'd better get in now."

He had lit the candles in the lamps and the small flames struggled feebly with the wicks.

They got in and slammed the door after them.

"It 's been a long trip," she said with another slight shiver.

"We 'll soon be back. The old man will have a big supper for us, I suppose, and everybody on the place to meet us. But we 'll get to bed as soon as we can."

"Yes."

She had been the one to talk before, but now she was silent. She had said that the trip had been a long one; she had not said that they had come a long way from Boston. Now the coach rolled forward and began to go down, and she felt it

taking hold of her. From what Henry had told her, she was aware of a bitterness between him and his family. Just what it was and just how she would find her place had never occurred to her till this moment; she had been so absorbed in him. She glanced at him again as if she expected a change.

The lamplight touched his face with a faint light and she could see only the features she had come to know so intimately in the past two weeks, a rather strong face, she had imagined, for all its smoothness — with dark eyes and a small repressed mouth. She wanted him to take her in his arms, but he did not offer to and she did not want to ask. So she turned her face to the window once more and saw the village lights rising toward them.

After a second stop, in which the driver removed the chains, they turned right toward the bridge, and the wheels echoed hollowly across it. There was a faint sheen on the river through which she saw the water running swiftly toward the falls. The horses were trotting now. On the far side of the river, the road tunneled through a spur of the unbroken wilderness; to right and left the occasional pine trunks rose up branchless out of undergrowth which the slanting moonlight touched to silver. The coach rolled smoothly down the grade, the spokes making a rattling hum in the fellies, and it seemed to Rose no time at all before they had swung between two square granite pillars.

She shrank back in her seat. But Henry leaned forward to meet the window lights. In spite of the friction he had intimated in his family, he was on familiar ground. She had a moment's view of the lawn running down from the drive toward the river; then the coach turned the corner of the porch smartly and drew up under the *porte-cochère*. For an instant there was a complete stillness, as if the occupants of the house had been struck still by the sound of wheels on the gravel; then the doors opened and she saw a thin man in shabby black come through.

"Hello, Parchal," Henry said. "This is Parchal Smith, Rose."

She accepted the introduction quietly, finding the man's

dull eyes on hers, twisted round for her reticule, and followed Henry out. It was a long step down, and when she looked up from negotiating her skirts, she found a group of people on the verandah.

"So you 're back and married, Henry."

The flat weight of the voice made her start, and she found her eyes immediately on the speaker's. At first they seemed black, like her husband's, then she saw that they were grey and colder. She had an odd impression that they were examining her personally, and in spite of herself she stirred restlessly, as a mare might at a sale. Then her chin squared. She was able to see the whole of the old man, red and hearty and enormous under his white hair. He put one arm about her so that she felt smothered and had to raise her face to his. It was a perfunctory kiss, but firmly laid on. She heard Henry saying, "This is Rose, Father." The heavy voice buzzed against her ear as he let her go. "Glad to have you, girl."

She was on the verandah now, in the midst of them, and as they went into the hall she began to pick out faces. Mrs. Brinley, that would be the housekeeper. They curtsied slightly and took stock, and Rose had a feeling of looking mussed. Before she could question herself of her impression, she found herself being led by Henry down a line of people. Two women servants, Lucy and Ellen something, she dismissed as unimportant. An old woman, with grey hair and strangely opaque, mahogany-colored eyes, of whom Henry said just "Nance" with such obvious distaste that she grinned thinly, surveyed her coldly. Daniel Harrow, the farmer, with shy greenish eyes and a lean reddened face gave her his hand awkwardly but kindly. It was the first face with a hint of welcome. "George is getting out the bags, you can see him to-morrow," Henry said. "Oh, here 's Joan. This is your new sister, Joan," he said offhandedly. Rose saw a shy face again, and a distinct appeal in the grey eyes, and in spite of the pressure of Henry's hand stepped over and kissed her. The girl looked twice-grown and clumsy in her flowered dress, and Rose flushed slightly at the eager return she made. At the same instant she heard a kind of growl over her shoulder, and swung round to see the old

man looking closely at her. Beyond him was the old woman, Nance, also watching her.

"Where 's Bascom?" the old man demanded angrily.

"Getting dressed," Joan said.

"I told him to be on time." He turned to Rose. "I hope you 'll excuse him. Perhaps you 'll be able to teach him some manners."

Rose said nothing. Henry touched her arm and led her into the room on the ground floor that was to be theirs. It had a high oak bed and dressing table, the tall mirror set low between two walls of narrow drawers, and a washstand with an ornate white and gold service. The towels were monogrammed elaborately; the white curtains had heavy edges of lace; and in spite of the deep carving of the picture frames, the ceiling seemed very high over her. Two candles burned in brackets on either side of the dressing table and another stood on the bureau for her hand, so that five shadows of her moved along the walls.

"Hurry," Henry said. "They 've been waiting supper."

"I feel so tired, Henry. Don't you?"

"All I need is some food. There 's that George with the bags. You 'd better let him in."

She opened the door and the groom limped in, his crooked shoulder letting Henry's big bag almost drag on the floor. He gave her a slant glance and set the bags down. "Thank you, George," she said. He turned away from Henry 's back and gave her a grin of yellow teeth.

"We 've been schooling a mare for you, ma'am."

"Oh?"

"She 's a dainty one, and I hope you 'll like her, and as black as the best night in the world."

She smiled. "I like black horses."

He touched his forehead with a crooked finger and limped out.

"He 's an impudent beggar," Henry said. "But the old man says he 's good with horses and keeps him on."

"I like him."

He opened her bag for her and went out. "Don't take longer

than you can help, dear. I 'll just run up to my old room and get my mail."

She took off her bonnet slowly before the glass. She looked still dazed from the onset of new faces. And now, when she tried to recall them, she found herself only conscious of the old man. It came over her that she had not entered a family; she had come into Henry's father's house. He oppressed her, as the heavy furniture oppressed her. He had towered so above her; he was so big; the house was so big; and this room was so big, in which Henry had left her alone.

In the mirror she saw her reflection, still flushed, the dark eyes misty. Henry had told her she was pretty, and she knew she was; and except for Joan with her awkward trembling hands she felt that she had made no impression. She poked her hair into place, and behind her her five shadows raised their elbows. She rushed through washing and stepped into the hall. She could hear voices from the dining room — the housekeeper's talking steadily and an occasional heavy kind of grunt from the old man. Henry was not in sight, and for an instant she lingered before the red-brick fireplace under the gleaming silver shield. Then she heard steps behind her and felt two hands on her shoulders. She leaned backward for Henry's kiss, closing her eyes.

She could have told the quick touch of Henry's lips anywhere; but these were not his. She had never been kissed so; her mouth was monopolized so completely that she felt no strength to open her eyes, but leaned further back. Then the pressure relaxed and she was able to see a pair of brilliant blue eyes looking into hers. His red lips were grinning.

"So you 're my new sister," he said. She straightened up with a slight aversive shiver, but immediately found herself turned in his hands to face him, and felt herself still fast. Her heart beat suddenly; there was no mistaking the admiration in his face. She flushed. He had done what was at once unforgivable and unforgettable; he had taken her off her guard, and it made her afraid. She thought, "He 'll kiss me again." Then they heard Henry coming down the stairs.

He did not let go of her until the instant Henry's face ap-

peared, but he said, "Congratulations, Henry. I never thought you could do as well as this."

Henry had a handful of letters.

"Oh," he said.

There was no mistaking the hostility between them.

As they turned to the dining room together, he touched her arm. "You don't mind my kissing you, you know. I 'm Bascom."

2

Old Wilder said grace from the head of the table, and Rose, on his right, watched him from the corners of her eyes. His coat sat well on his shoulders, the double-notch of the lapels setting off their breadth. There was no religious emotion in the words as he spoke them; he did it in the manner of discipline. Rose wondered if he were conscious of the imposing figure he made, his red face bent forward on his barrel chest, his eyes closed under the black brows, his massive hands folded before his plate. Behind him, his rusty black lending a dim sort of austerity to the sentences, stood Parchal Smith. His eyes also were lowered, but once, glancing at him, Rose was amused to see his right eye making the circuit of the plates, as if to be sure that nothing had been forgotten. Over his head a moose's antlers spread out like a pair of monstrous wings. She had never seen such horns, and in her amazement she forgot the grace going forward.

"A moose," Ralph said suddenly in her ear. "My father shot him down in the glen, where the deer park is."

"Oh. I 've never seen anything so big."

"Yes, it is a good head. Father dropped him with the second shot. He was a tough old scoundrel."

"Are there any like him now?" she asked.

A glint of amusement showed in his eyes.

"You 'd have to go quite a ways back into the woods to find them now."

He turned his attention to the plate of soup set down by Parchal. The spoon in his hand looked brittle. The one in her

own weighted her wrist. He ate the soup with a steady lifting of the spoon and an audible suck at the end of each.

Rose glanced round the table. The cloth was exquisite linen, spotless, hardly what she would have expected in this distant land. At each end heavy silver candlesticks rose with a tree of candles; between them a silver bowl carried a mass of daffodils. The plate was ornate and heavy and uncomfortable in one's hand; the dishes white, monogrammed in gold. She glanced at the initials on the fork — E. J. W. They must have stood for Henry's mother.

Old Wilder carved the roast of mutton with savage directness, giving heavy slices which Parchal carried lugubriously to their destined places.

"I thought you 'd rather not be bothered sitting at the end of the table to-night," said the old man. "Of course you will to-morrow."

She bowed slightly, then glanced to see if she could read the housekeeper's eyes. They were lowered, but the woman's mouth was tight. Suddenly their eyes met.

"I thought you might be tired. It must have been a long trip."

"Yes," said Rose. "The roads were bad below Boonville."

Their voices were stiffly polite.

The meal went on quickly. Henry, on her right, kept his eyes on his plate; opposite her Joan ate quietly, watching her hands; beside her she could hear the old man's even breathing.

It was only when they had finished the meat course that she allowed her eyes to turn to Bascom. All along she had been conscious of his occasional glances; but now, as they all leaned back to wait for the dessert, she looked at him directly. He was staring over Henry's head, his red lips drooping thoughtfully. She seized the instant to straighten her lace collar.

Then the old man questioned her about her parents and she bent forward to answer him.

"I remember when they lived in Rome on North James Street. I stopped there sometimes on the way to Rome. You were n't more than four then."

"I guess so. I don't remember; but Father often spoke of you."

"I 'm glad to hear they 're well."

He turned away abruptly.

"Bascom, I 'll want you down at the farm in the morning."

"All right, what time?"

Rose kept her eyes up to meet his; but they passed her.

"Eight o'clock. You 'll be busy getting unpacked, I suppose, Henry?"

"Yes. What 's going on?"

Bascom answered. "Father 's planning a small improvement."

The old man flushed.

"You would n't be interested — either of you. But you 'll have to work just the same."

He put his napkin down beside his plate, a rumpled ball, got to his feet, and went out.

"I think I 'll go to bed," Rose said.

"I should think you 'd be tired," said Mrs. Brinley, again.

"I 'll come soon," said Henry. He glanced at the mail in his hand.

"All wrought up about the poor niggers still, are n't you?" Bascom asked. "Well, you 've got enough letters to set them free. I don't see why you don't start freeing yourself."

The old man appeared in the door, his hat on his head and a long coat on his shoulders.

"I 've got to go down to see Dan Harrow. Good night. Good night, Rose."

"Good night," Rose said.

He stamped over to Joan and put his arm round her.

"Go to bed early, Joan."

"Yes, Father."

Mrs. Brinley went out of the room after Joan and the old man. Rose stood by her chair. "You 'll come soon, Henry?"

"Yes."

"He 's got to read his mail," Bascom explained. "You see, we both have to stay here and amuse ourselves. I like my way,

and Henry likes seeing the niggers freed — Lord knows why, or cares. But the old man has us. Right now he 's busy fixing up the farm for you and Henry."

"I 'll have the money," Henry said.

"I think he 's taken a shine to Rose," said Bascom, "though you can't tell. But he 's got an idea of making a big barn."

"It sounds exciting," Rose said. "I 'd like a farm."

Both of them glanced at her; she looked pale and slim and tall beside the table in her grey traveling dress with her dark hair carelessly arranged.

Henry said, "You 'd better get to bed, dear."

He went over to the door with her. She looked over her shoulder as she went through. Bascom was staring after her, his blue eyes dancing.

"It sounds exciting," he repeated. "Good night."

He gave her a bow. It was gracefully done.

After they had gone, he stood still a moment, holding the back of his chair. Then Parchal came in to clear the table.

"What do you think of her, Parchal?"

The man stared questioningly from his soupy eyes.

"Rose," said Bascom. "Mrs. Henry. What do you think of her?"

"Oh," said the servant, "she looks like an active girl."

"Active? Perhaps she is. Do you think she 's pretty, Parchal?"

"Pretty, Bascom?"

"Yes. How does she look to your knowing eye, Parchal?"

"Well, I don't know — "

"Has she a good leg, Parchal?"

The man stared bewildered. "I don't know. Leg, Bascom? I ain't seen it yet."

Bascom shouted with laughter. It rang through the house. Rose, undressing before the mirror, liked the sound of it. It was the first laughter she had heard that evening. Henry had not come in, and when she was ready for bed she blew out all the candles but one and stood in the window, looking over the lawn. In the moonlight she saw a grey horse with a man on his back and the white shape of a dog loping behind. He

raised his head as he went under the window, and she saw it was Bascom.

He was on his way. As he rode through the pine woods and out across the bridge, he lifted the horse into a canter.

"Who 'd have thought Henry would have done so well?" he said to the mare's ears.

They went through the village, only one light now burning in the village store, and he had a glimpse of three men sitting at the stove. "There 's Driscoll all right," he said to himself. The mare slowed at the hills, and he went forward into the darkness, smiling.

Bascom's moods came quickly. A moment before he had seen Rose's pale face before him and tasted her mouth with his again in retrospect. Her slight aversion, which had succeeded the kiss, piqued him. He had not experienced it before. Even old Nance, who had been his nurse, looked up to him. The girls all of them had welcomed him. From the very beginning. Emily, when he was thirteen and the old man had been building the first barn: he remembered the sweet hay smell against the smell of new wood and the sudden evolving of dusty shadows in the mow, the spring of the grass, his own sense of suffocation when the dog barked in the barn and the cowbells rang, and Nance's harsh old voice calling. . . . Emily, May, Pearl; he loved them all. There were others; they were married, most of them. He remembered his father at the weddings, the lickings in the early days, the lectures now, and all the time the old man must have had his tongue in his cheek, the old snort! . . .

But the sight of Driscoll sitting in the store stirred him loose of his revery. His hand went to his waistcoat pocket and felt the narrow package he had bought that afternoon. He smiled, then whistled softly. There was a gentle curve on his lips when he finished the tune. The mare pricked her ears toward the silence ahead and topped the hill. As he swung her into the south road, she broke into a canter.

It was Pearl now — he remembered how he had first seen her riding through High Falls beside the bridegroom, her pretty bonnet on her back and the bow at her chin, her small

head of reddish hair in the full glare of heat. Little girl, how had he never suspected her living alone with her trapper father for nineteen years in Diana. He had pulled the mare aside on the bridge to congratulate Driscoll. Driscoll's dark face had been lit then, his sad brown eyes alive; one scarcely noticed the clubfoot on the dashboard. They had talked for a spell over the running river, with the thunder of the falls straining their voices. But Bascom had seen the warm shadow come into her eyes while she sat silent by her husband's side, and he had a distant consciousness of the water running below them. When at last the wagon had moved on, he had felt a tearing in him, as if a part of his heart went with it behind the worn old horse to the bridal. . . .

His knees gripped the mare and felt her life. At the pressure she lifted; her canter sank under him, her lean neck stretched out, and she settled into a flinging run. Turbulence mastered his heart; he felt the song of mounting blood, and the drumming of the mare's hoofs beat upon his ears to the drumming within him. At her side was the loping bitch.

The wind was at his back as he went southward, a light touch against his shoulders, and the night seemèd still. On his left below he saw snatches of the Black River. There were no farms in this stretch, only the silent river in the woods and now and then the canal. He saw the small glimmer of a night lantern between trunks.

The life of the woods was silenced at his passing as if the presence of the bitch had frozen the rabbits in their forms and turned the foxes aside from their trails. Far back in the heart of the balsams he passed a single sound, an early thrush finishing its song — elusive, sweet notes that fumbled at his heart. He no longer felt the mare; he traveled like a man asleep with the single consciousness of knowing his love. He did not see the scattered houses or the narrow bridge over the river when the mare took him through Port Leyden. His face was lifted to the dim sky.

He did not see the bitch head into the well-known road to Driscoll's place, her watchful nose to the air. He did not hear the overburdened river, sucking the banks. He saw only the

silent, dark house beside the little barn, and the slight, swaying figure, pale in the dark door.

He dismounted as though the air would bear him if he walked, and his long strides carried him to the stoop. She was saying, "I 've been waiting so long, Bascom." He reached out with his hands to find her, and she came close into his arms until he could see vaguely her eyes and her childish mouth, and feel her trembling.

The bitch lay down in front of the mare, and the mare lowered her head to cover the bitch with gentle breaths. They both kept their eyes on the figures in the doorway and listened to their voices.

She did not call her husband by his first name to Bascom; an odd pride forbade it.

"Driscoll said he 'd be gone to-night and I 'd hoped you 'd come."

"I did, Pearl."

"Did you see him in town, Bascom?"

She spoke his name with a pathetic note of proprietorship.

"Yes, I saw him in Munn's yard. He was in the store to-night, too, when I came by."

"It took you a long time to come," she said suddenly.

"We had to wait supper for Henry and his wife."

She drew a little away from him.

"Is she nice?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Is she pretty?"

"Yes, she 's very pretty."

He kissed her, and for a moment he felt Rose's lips again. He looked out at the mare and caught the soft sheen of her eyes. Peepers along the river were beginning their shrill piping, here and there a single note, then a courageous run of voices, then the silence and the soft sucking noise of the river. His hand clenched and he felt Pearl's hand there.

"I 've heard she was pretty."

"Don't be a little fool, Pearl."

She drew in to him.

"Driscoll won't be back to-night, Bascom."

They were drawing it out, the tenderness in the quiet before the little barnyard and the leaning branches of the trees. The face of Rose faded; the peepers took up their cry; he had an echo of the thrush's song and in the dimness he felt the joy of an old pulse beating.

"Sometimes I 'm afraid, Bascom."

"He 's good to you, is n't he?"

"Yes — It is n't him. Oh, Bascom, you 'll always come, won't you?"

Bascom laughed softly. The bitch lifted her head as if at a familiar sound. But the figures had vanished through the dark door. She flopped up on her feet and loped back down the road a little way and took her place beside a balsam. The mare went over to the trough and drank. Rain drifted through the woods. A thin mist was born on the river. Over the bitch an owl slid swiftly. . . .

Bascom came out of the house alone. The rain had stopped, but spent drops muttered from the eaves. Through the trees he could see a pale light growing over the hills.

He stood straight with his feet slightly apart, one hand buttoning his coat. He smiled to see the mare beside the barn, one hip slung for comfort. Then he whistled a single high note, so shrill as to be nearly inaudible to a human ear. But the mare's head lifted, and an instant later the bitch came up the road. Bascom mounted and both animals turned toward home.

This time they took the way between the rivers. When they emerged at the bridge above High Falls the sun was rising and the whole dome of the sky above the valley was flooded with amber and rose. Beyond the falls they saw the river stretching out, the eddies alive with the glow.

They entered the drive at a quiet walk. The house still slept. Bascom's wary eye wandered for an instant to the window of the best bedroom. The bitch led the way to the stable, the mare refrained from tossing her head, there was no rattle of bits to betray the rider. But sitting on an up-ended bucket in the stall door, the groom, George, was polishing old Ralph's boots. He cocked his head against his crooked shoulder. His alert

black eyes stared impudently at the shine growing under the cloth. He was whistling.

"And all night long I held her in my arms,
Just to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew."

Bascom grinned.

3

A sensitive person, in strange surroundings, generally wakes with a start. Just at dawn, Rose discovered herself lying stiff on her side of the big bed. Her eyes rested on a landscape of cattle and castle on the opposite wall, but refused acceptance; for an instant she had not the slightest idea of where she lay. Then, as if afraid to look, she poked one foot sideways until she touched a corner of Henry's nightshirt. That relieved her and she looked round the room.

It was pleasanter now, with the early sunlight making traceries of the elms' branches on the walls. She could not be certain of what had waked her; but she had a vague impression that a horse had passed along the drive. She put her hands between her neck and her hair and lay still looking along her length. Her slim body sank so deep into the feather tick that the blankets crossed her with no apparent ridge. Frowning slightly, she went over her arrival, little by little, trying to recall the faces and names. Only two impressions remained with complete vividness: Bascom's kiss and the friendly shy grasp of the farmer's hand — Harrow, that was his name. But by those two she had established herself again, and, entirely unconscious of not having looked at Henry, she allowed herself to doze off.

An hour later she was barely aware of Henry getting up. "You 'd better stay in bed a while longer," he said to her; "the old man won't kick. He 's apt to eat early, and you can have yours any time up to nine. I 've got to answer some of these letters."

He bent over her for a brief kiss. The response of her mouth was so slight that he thought her still sleeping and went out

DISCARDED

on tiptoe. As soon as he had closed the door, she regretted not kissing him. Since their arrival he had become a lonely figure in her eyes, and now that she thought of it, something seemed to be closing between them. When she had first seen him he had offered a thrilling picture — not only the love that she imagined to herself, but an escape. They were living then in a little country parish, which admitted no society. Rose had no wish to visit her Salem cousins to be outshined in the eyes of their beaux, or else to make a showing in borrowed dresses. She preferred to remain inconspicuously at home, where Henry found her and captivated her.

His love-making had never burned her; he had never seemed to rely completely upon her love. But her knowledge of men was so small that only now, after two weeks of marriage, was she becoming aware of existing capacities in herself. Both of them had been blundering children content at a game. And at this moment he was in his study. She could imagine him at a desk writing long serious letters in his minute hand. She knew what they would look like. The letters he had written her during their short engagement, while he was held fast on this farm, had been long and serious. But she had them with her — with their matter-of-fact sentences about each other, and the long heated paragraphs about slavery. A hidden instinct must have told her something, though she wrote as serious, stilted letters in reply and gave him news of abolitionist activity in Boston.

He had met a Reverend Mr. May from Syracuse when he was returning from college from the summer holidays in his senior year, and since then he had held the man up for her to admire. He ran a branch of the underground railway through Syracuse, and to him Henry had proposed a route to High Falls and through the woods to Malone, where the border was open. Such a route would take money to maintain, and the societies had little to spare. Henry had described to her his attempt to enlist his father's interest. The old man had gone up like a rocket: "What? Pay out good money to rob some poor Southern man of his property? Don't be a damn fool, Henry."

"You can't expect to own a human soul. It 's no man's right."

"Keep still and get out. Your Latin study 's enough for me to put up with, when you ought to be taking an interest in the farm."

"I don't want the farm."

"Keep still. By God, I 'll give you the farm and not a penny else if you get mixed up in such rottenness. You 'll learn what property is."

"There 'll be war anyway."

"Don't bother me with war. It won't hit us here. There would n't be war if a lot of crazy fool Yankees would keep their dirty noses out of other people's business."

The old man had ruled the roost so long he had no notion of morality, or public affairs. Even in the legislature he had been interested only in roads, railroads, and the canal. Henry's letter had fairly steamed; she had liked reading it. He was probably writing one like it now. And she was married to him. And he had brought her home. . . .

The soft clutch of the bed held her half asleep, half awake. Though she saw nothing, the sounds of morning came to her from a long way off, but very clearly.

Somewhere from the east she heard a dog's sharp barking, the distant clink of cowbells, small close notes from cows going leisurely to pasture, and the faint sound of a cock crowing. Quick steps passed her door; a little later the noise of the kitchen stove being stoked with wood. Silence clung to the house for half an hour before it was again broken.

It was her father-in-law's voice shouting from the top of the stairs, "Parchal!"

No answer. "Parchal!"

She relaxed, relishing her own quiet. Somewhere a clock struck seven. The old man's heavy voice vibrated with outraged passion.

"Seven o'clock! Where 's my hot water?"

From the kitchen came the butler's flat tones.

"Ye-anh?"

"Where 's my *hot water?*"

"Com-ming."

She could hear old Ralph's bare feet slapping along the floor

above her head. His room must be over hers. In a moment the butler's tread shambled past the door. Rose yawned. Voices overhead could be easily heard. "What in thunder 's kept you, Parchal?"

"The fire would n't drawr. It would n't drawr at all. I blowed and blowed, but it would n't drawr."

"I 'll drawr you. Hurry up and shave me. And quit blowing."

Steps passing began to make breakfast manœuvres. She thought she recognized the housekeeper's and Joan's, and she heard the housekeeper directing the laying of the fire in the hall. Then the family going to breakfast. Rose found it difficult even to think of getting up.

It was well past eight when a tapping on the door brought her almost out of sleep.

"Come in," she said.

The door opened gently and Joan slipped timidly into the room, a vase of violets in her hand. She wore a violet-checked gingham work dress and her coarse black hair in a loose knot at the back of her head, wisps dangling against her freckled cheeks.

"Good morning, Rose. I meant to have some flowers for you last night, but I forgot, so I got a few in the glen right after breakfast."

"Oh, thank you. Bring them over and let me smell them."

Joan brought them over to the pillow and held them down. As Rose put her face against them, her eyes fell on the big hand. She felt a friendly sort of pity for the girl.

"Are n't they sweet, Joan? I love violets best of all flowers."

"Do you?" asked Joan, and she allowed her grey eyes to look at Rose for the first time since entering the room.

Rose smiled and held up her hands. "Kiss me good-morning."

The girl's eyes misted suddenly and her hand shook, slopping a little water on Rose's shoulder.

"Oh, I 'm sorry." She drew back. "I 'm so clumsy. Mrs. Brinley says so all the time."

"Never mind. Put them on the bureau where I can see them and then come and kiss me."

"Really?" Joan set them down carefully and returned. "I 've wet your nightdress. Is n't it pretty? Mrs. Brinley won't let me have any like that. She says night clothes are just to be worn."

"Never mind her," Rose said. There was a hint of savagery in her voice. She caught Joan's shoulders and pulled her down and kissed her. For an instant the girl's shoulders were stiff; then they relaxed and her weight almost smothered Rose; she began to sob, harsh hard sobs like a man. Rose held her hard against her breast. At last she felt awake.

"Don't cry," she said after a few minutes. Then, as the sobs continued, almost severely, "Stop it, Joan."

Joan obeyed with a last heave of her back. They held each other's hands for a while. Then Joan asked, "Do you like me?" and Rose answered in a matter-of-fact way, "Yes, very much."

"I 'm glad. I 've been wondering if you would. Father is good to me, and so is Bascom. But I don't think Henry likes me very much, and I was afraid you would n't. Mrs. Brinley does n't like me at all, I know."

"How do you know?"

"She says I 'm stupid and always will be."

"Rubbish."

They heard footsteps coming along the drive. One set walked with brisk short strides; the other came shufflingly.

Joan's eyes lighted. "That 's Pete and Leo."

"Who are they?"

"Pete 's the carpenter and Leo helps him."

They listened. Outside a man said, "Put one foot in front of the other, Leo, and then the other foot ahead of that one, and keep a-doing it a little quicker every time, and maybe you 'll learn how to walk."

The shuffling steps halted.

"Yeanh," said a high, puzzled voice, "but you ain't carrying no barn on your back."

The other halted too. "Barn? A big man like you all bent up under a little tool chest, thinking it 's a barn."

"It 's got the tools into it. It amounts to a barn."

"Well, keep on trying, Leo. We 're pretty close to there. I 'll stiddy you. Why, you 're all of a sweat."

The steps went ahead, and the girls heard Leo's voice, "Any man would sweat with a barn cramping his inwards, would n't they?"

Rose jumped out of bed and went to the window in time to see them disappearing round the corner of the house — the little erect figure of Pete, red-headed in the sun, and Leo's great body, bent under the huge chest, ambling amiably behind. Joan said at her shoulder, "They 're going to build Father's barn."

"I must get dressed now," Rose said. "No, please stay with me till I 've had breakfast."

Joan said nothing while Rose dressed, but her grey eyes followed her movements and rested wonderingly on her clothes and her smooth white shoulders, and watched enviously the curls being twisted into place. They went into the dining room to find it empty, the table bare but for one place set for Rose. "I 'll get Parchal," Joan said, and presently she came back with the butler. Rose said, "Good morning," and received a "Morning" from him and an opaque stare from his stale eyes. She asked for an egg and coffee, and while he went in search of them, as if he appeared dubious of success, she ate preserved raspberries and talked to Joan.

"Bascom and Henry said something about the barn last night. But they did n't seem to know anything about it, really."

"I know," Joan said. "Father 's told me. It 's for a hundred head."

"What do you mean?"

"That means cows, a hundred cows."

"My, that sounds like a lot."

"Yes; won't it be fine, with all the bells ringing in the barn?"

"Yes. I shall want to hear it. What will you do with so many?"

"Father says make butter and sell it in Rome."

"How can you get it down?"

"Father says by boats. You see, the canal can take it. Father did a lot about it. I remember when it came through I was a

little girl and we all went over to the village to see the water coming into the river again. We used to make cheese, but Father thinks butter will pay better. Father says that 's what the canal was for."

Rose was silent. He could n't have meant that for his butter he had had a canal built forty miles over a divide. But as Joan said it, it sounded so.

Parchal returned with the coffee and egg and rolls. She noticed that the coffee was fresh made.

"Thank you so much," she said. She noticed the man looking at her from the door and, following his gaze, was amazed to find it fixed upon the hem of her skirt. But she could see nothing wrong. Suddenly he met her eye; a painful flush came over his face, and he vanished into the pantry.

"Is there anything wrong with my dress, Joan?"

Joan saw nothing wrong.

"Parchal has ideas sometimes and they puzzle him when he has them," a voice said. Rose swung round. Bascom stood in the door, in work clothes, the sunlight lighting his nut-brown hair with a golden tint. His pink cheeks shone healthily over his tawny beard and his blue eyes danced.

"Good morning, sisters."

They both said good-morning.

"I 've got to get down to work. The old man is trailing me. Joan, would you make us some switchel? It 's going to be hot to-day."

"Yes, I 'd love to."

Bascom's eyes met Rose's again before he turned out. She could make nothing of them; then she flushed and was uneasy for having searched at all.

"Can't I help you, Joan?"

"Yes, if you want to take down a pail."

"What is switchel?"

"It 's a drink of ginger and water and vinegar. Men like it when they 're hot. I 'll be going down at ten o'clock. I 'll be in the kitchen."

"Where 's Henry?"

"He 's in his study. It 's upstairs at the back."

Rose went up. The stairs mounted to the next floor in two flights, a landing between filling the width of the hall. The upstairs hall was shaped like a narrow cross, the arms crossing the width of the house and ending at the stairs, the tree running the length, and lighted at the front by a circular small window in yellow glass with a border of alternate panes of rose and purple. Doors opened on each side, and Rose noticed the old man's room, clothes tumbled on the floor at the foot of the bed, and Parchal bending over them sorting them out.

She went toward the back of the house, where the hall ended in darkness against closed panels. She rapped lightly, and entered.

Seated at an old mahogany table, Henry was busily finishing a letter. "Good morning, dear. I 'll be done in just a minute."

She drew back to the corner of the table. The window at his left gave her a view through the patch of woods at the back of the house to the meadows. Just beyond the trees she saw a small garden patch; the borders of the central walk bright with daffodils. Henry's thin dark face came against them; and looking at him and the flowers she had a feeling of him cut off from the rest of the family. She noticed that even the view had been carefully trimmed; in summer, with the leaves out, no one in the house could see the garden except from this window.

The study itself also gave her a new impression of him. The narrow bed he had used formerly stood against the far corner, beside it a closet door and opposite the foot of it a small stove tapping the kitchen chimney. The window at his desk was flanked with two bookcases carrying leather-bound books — Martial, Horace, Plutarch, Tacitus, she caught the names in gold — and pamphlets. She picked one up: *Universal Brotherhood;* a sermon by Mr. May, First Unitarian Church, Syracuse, New York.

But what interested her most were the books on horticulture, and a garden calendar made out in Henry's hand, an enormous dried hollyhock stalk in one corner. He saw her looking at it. "That was the biggest one I ever raised," he said. "It 's just short of ten feet. It 's rather messy, but I like to keep it."

"I did n't know you liked flowers, Henry."

He looked uneasily out of the windows.

"Someone has to keep the garden up."

"Does n't Joan like them?"

"Oh, she 's always pulling up the wrong things."

Suddenly Rose said, "Good morning, dearest. Are n't you going to kiss me?"

He got up and kissed her quickly. "I did this morning, but you were still asleep. You slept solidly all night. How do you feel?"

"Very well."

"You look well."

"Yes. Joan came in and brought me some flowers. Was n't it nice of her? I think she 's a dear, but she 's awfully shy. I don't think the housekeeper is good for her."

"Oh, Mrs. Brinley is very efficient. She 's run things ever since Mother died, and brought Joan up. The old man has a quarrel with her about once a month, but we could n't do without her."

"She seems to be very strict with Joan."

"You have to be. Joan 's not quite right, I guess. Nobody knows what 's wrong with her."

"Are you all done writing?"

"One more letter."

"Oh, don't now, come out and walk around."

"No, I 've got to do this one."

"I wish you 'd not. I 've hardly seen you since we got here."

He grinned shyly. "It was pretty much of a rush, getting into the house. I tell you, I 'm going over to the village to mail these when I 'm done. Drive over with me and we can get the mail."

Rose hesitated, thinking of Joan's eager invitation to see the barn. "I 've promised to help Joan at ten. We're going down to the barn and taking the men a drink. I saw the carpenter going by this morning. I want to see them starting work. You see, I 'm a farm wife now," she smiled at him, "and I want to know everything about it."

He said, "Oh, all right. Never mind. By the way, Father

said he 'd like a talk with you. You 'll feel you 're taking on a new job. He likes to define a person's duties and he 'll tell you everything he wants you to do. You need n't if you don't want to. We can see him together."

Rose felt a slight excitement.

"No, I ought to do what he wants. It is a kind of business, you know, Henry."

"Well, don't let him get you under his thumb. You married me and not him, remember."

Rose said, "I should think you 'd have entered a profession if you did n't want to stay here."

"I could n't have gone on with this," he pointed to his books. "And why should I look after the farm? Bascom can do that. There 's plenty of money. But the old man likes to have people under him. He 'd own slaves down south; but he almost manages that up here anyway."

"Come down to the barn with us," said Rose. "Or come down with me; we 'll meet Joan there and she won't be disappointed. Oh, darling, I do love you."

He smiled at her. "That did n't sound very logical. Go on out. I don't mind. We 've got all our lives. I want to get this letter off in time."

"Bother the letter," she said, with a hint of annoyance. She went to the door, whirled lightly to blow him a kiss, then pouted like a small girl as she saw him already bent over the paper. She wanted to slam the door, but he said, "Shall I give your mother any message? I 'm writing her."

She blushed scarlet. "Please give her my love and say I said I was very happy," she replied in a low voice, and closed the door gently behind her.

III

BREAKING GROUND

1

The result of Henry's last sentence had been an instant's feeling of shame, which went with her to the downstairs hall. She stood there for a breath, about to reconsider his invitation to the post office. It was dusky in the hall before the fireplace, though the front doors opening on the verandah showed her the lawn beyond bright and green under a hot sun. She looked slim and small, alone on the hearth in her thin print dress, with her dark eyes wide — almost the child that had married a man two weeks ago. Then the sound of feet coming down the stairs produced an odd effect. Her eyes partially closed and she let her head lean back, and her figure, becoming suddenly languorous, showed surprisingly a woman's. The color ebbed from her cheeks, then began to rise evenly from her breast until it had reached her forehead.

Joan said, "I was just hunting for you. My, you look hot."

Rose shivered. "Yes, it is hot."

"The men have been going by. They 're all down now. Shall we take the switchel? They 'll be digging when we get there."

"Yes," said Rose. They went out to the kitchen together.

The kitchen was enormous, low-ceilinged, a great stove on curly legs rising up against one wall, its oven thrust out like an alderman's paunch. A red-faced woman of much the same build as the oven sat at a table cleaning sorrel spinach, and acknowledged Joan's introduction of Mrs. Smith. She looked as if she liked making good food, but liked eating it better, and she smiled friendlily on Joan and Rose and went into a pantry with them for vinegar and into a closet for ginger, and

worked the pump for them with a red hand that seemed joined directly to a round forearm with no wrist at all. Whenever she stirred she put on the air a smell of flour and fresh butter.

They mixed the switchel in two deep copper buckets, which cast up reddish winks through the brown drink, and they plunged a dipper into each half the length of its arm. Rose tasted it, and Mrs. Smith smiled to see her pucker. "Yeanh, it tastes sour, but it makes cold in a man's stomach."

They left the house by the woodshed, where the stove wood was built up in walls, and hams swung from the rafters, and took the narrow path through the woods beyond. In a minute they emerged from the pines' cool touch into the full glare of sunlight. Ahead of them stretched the meadow, making a sharp line against the alder swamp where a small white cottage stood.

"That 's the farmhouse," Joan said, "and the other little building is the hog house. The old barn used to be just behind, but it burnt down and Father had a low roof put on the foundation, just to cover the cattle."

She walked with a stout stride, swinging her bucket easily where Rose had to balance hers with an outstretched arm.

"There are the men."

Perhaps thirty men were standing in a ragged line on the edge of the meadow. Their figures were as short as ants, but even at that distance it could be seen that they were all watching a team on their left. The horses moved with tantalizing deliberation, turned slowly, and started back to the men. "They 've just ploughed the first furrow," cried Joan, and her eyes glistened. "There comes the first stone, too." Rose, struggling with her bucket, looked to the left. A wagon lumbered along the road, axles complaining heavily, and as it lurched into a rut the girls could hear the tick of stones in its low box.

One of the men in the group turned toward them, pointed to the wagon, and the others also turned.

"That 's Bascom," Joan cried. "Come on, Rose."

It was a clear hot day, the meadows stretched flat under a slight haze toward the river, and the hills on the horizon were

still pale with snow. The men had felt it in their bodies when they came together on the slope of the ground, leaving their rigs tied before the barn. They stood round, hands in pockets. They were a little silent, a little puzzled; they knew there was a barn to be built, but no more; and being on Wilder's land they did not talk. But they called it early weather.

So Pete called it when he came among them with Bascom at nine o'clock. "A fine day for commencement." His eyes shone. "Set down that box over there, Leo." And Leo with a groan set down the heavy box at last. And for a minute they all stood still, while Bascom's great white bitch circled them with her examining nose, and then went off to sleep curled close under a wagon.

"Morning," they said to Bascom, and took Pete's words, "A fine day for the commencement, ain't it?" Bascom grinned and some of the younger men grinned back. He knew them all. The older men looked nervous. A young man's sullen eye found his.

"Where do we commence?" young Samuel asked.

Bascom shrugged his shoulders.

"I could n't tell you, Samuel; I 'm just a worker on this job. Pete there 's boss."

Pete drew himself up importantly.

"Get out of the way," he cried. He took a small white stake and hammer and went free of the group. They watched him drive it into a nubble of sod close to the edge of the slope. Then he crouched behind it, sighting, waving his hand for them to step back.

"Take that other stake, Leo. Now walk along the aidge of the slope. Keep a-going. More right. Don't hurry, Leo. More left, you big bezabor. Consider you 're sober and do the best you can." Pete's voice was high, shrill.

They watched Leo's big legs moving heavily along. His simple fat face wore a concentrated frown as he tried to hold himself to a straight course. The sun caught a spark from the claw of the new hammer in his fist; the hammer looked minute.

"Me and Ralph marked it off last night," Pete was saying.

"Keep a-going, Leo. You can set down a spell when you get there. That 's fair, a little right. NOW! Just a little right. Sight acrost that skunk cabbage. A little *right*. He always thinks it 's left, the poor bezabor. There. Hammer that stake in."

They saw Leo look down at the spot marked. He placed the stake carefully down.

"Hammer it down."

But Leo leaned on the stake, poised gently, like a good horse taking weight against the collar. His round arm stretched out before him — the wrist arched slightly, the knuckles white on the big hand; and the stake sank slowly inch by inch, true as a plumb, while he held the hammer idly in his other hand.

A sigh went up from the group. They glanced from Pete to Leo.

"Gol, what a barn!"

Suddenly Samuel growled: "It 'll take a year to build a barn that big!"

An older man nodded soberly. They shifted their feet uneasily and the sod squeaked under their shoes; and the water oozed out. Bascom, among them, became aware of a rebellious spirit; they had forgotten his presence. His lips drew back in a grin, and he felt the bitch pressed against his leg, her tail wagging in short tremulous jerks. "Lie down, Juno." She went away.

"Old Wilder ain't going to keep me from ploughing."

"Nor me from haying."

"How 'm I to get my potatoes digged?" another asked sarcastically.

"We ain't all. He 's hired Domser and O'Rourke and Driscoll and eight more with their teams. They 're hauling stone. Stone!" The man spat high to one side.

"Yeanh." It was Pete's voice. "Foundation work six feet above the meadow. That 's twenty feet on the lower side."

Trace chains jingled from the barn; they turned. The farmer was coming out with the big chestnut team hooked to a plough. They saw excitement in his green eyes. His high lean cheeks were calm.

"Morning, Harrow."

"Morning, Dan."

He nodded to them. The team walked stride for stride to the farther stake where Pete was standing, and turned as if they understood what they were meant to do.

Dan yanked the plough back and set the point. The lines about his neck swung loose. "Haw, Rob, steady."

They had caught sight of the other stake and Leo beside it mopping his fat face with a yellow handkerchief; they had caught the line; they settled gently against the collars and stepped ahead deliberately. The point of the plough bit easily in, singing as it snipped the sod; then it found its depth, the crinkled rool of earth became a thick smooth ribbon, and the share sighed as the wet earth pressed against it. The team went straight, and Pete said, "Gol." And Leo wished he could have kept a line so easily. The other men stepped over to Pete. "There ain't hardly a hitch into the whole of it," they said. "Scarce a bend at all."

The farmer let the plough slip out and heel on its side as the team slowed. "Whoa." He leaned against the cocked helve and surveyed the line. "Good ploughing," Bascom called to him. "They 've won in ploughing match twice in Lowville," Dan said proudly. Those men to whom the horses were strangers went over to them and started examining them with their hands.

"What are we going to do?" Bascom asked Pete.

The little man wiped his eyes with his shirt sleeve. "Dig out the stable."

The men looked at him uneasily, shifting their weight from foot to foot. They were embarrassed, disinclined to work. Full morning heated the sky; the smell of wet meadows made the air sweet; there was a golden light in the blue and great summer clouds were sailing slowly over them.

Then they saw Leo start. "Come on," he shouted. "Get shovels. There 're new ones down into the barn."

Bascom glanced up. Halfway across the meadow the old man was walking towards them, head up, hat pushed back, his boots thrusting hard against the sod. By the time he reached

the new furrow the men were trooping back, shovels on shoulders, the spades shining like silver. The old man looked for evidence of work and snorted. Pete came over to him. "We was just waiting for you to come, Mister Wilder. I 've marked out the upper line — is it all right?"

The blood darkened Ralph's cheeks.

"Right?" he roared. "Did n't I show you yesterday how it was to go?"

He raised his stick, jammed it deep into the earth. Leo was regarding him with staring eyes.

"All right," Ralph said. "Now you 've marked it, get to going. Dan, keep breaking sod on the upper edge. The rest of you can commence loosening the earth on the upper slope. We 're going to shove the sidehill into the swale to make a road round the bottom side of the barn."

He stepped back as the team came round to the first stake and he watched the plough sink and another furrow opening beside the first, neatly filling it. The ground was soft and the men dug easily. A mound began rising at the foot of the slope.

Ralph's eyes gleamed under his heavy brows. The work had started. For a while he walked back and forth among the men, giving them short greetings which they returned as shortly. When he had passed they stared a moment at the coat tight across his shoulders, spat on their hands, and resumed shoveling.

Bascom, with his sleeves rolled back on his white arms, was digging with the others. The sweat already showed on his neck. He did not work with the same slow efficiency as the farmers, but his effort had zest in it. He too had caught the spirit of the barn. He threw a glance at his father, but Ralph ignored it. The old man was secretly pleased. He wondered how long Bascom's enthusiasm would last. It was the first time he had ever seen him knuckle to with evident pleasure.

His eye sought the work again. "Dan, when you 've loosed enough sod, get the scraper. No use shoveling all of that when the scraper 'll take it down easy. I 'll have another team this afternoon."

"Yeanh," said Dan, his hands on the plough, his eye on the furrow.

Pete was striding back and forth, hands in pockets. He noticed Leo staring toward the river. "Get a spade and dig, Leo. You ain't paid to think. You ain't an actual carpenter yet." Leo sighed and picked up the shovel unwillingly. He leaned slowly on it, pulled it up deliberately, and tossed a great load off the slope. Pete grinned impudently up at Ralph. "It takes all a man can do to keep them working."

Ralph said, "What did you see, Leo?"

"Stone."

A lumber wagon was turning off the main road into the meadows. They saw the driver sway as it lurched off the shoulder, and first the off and then the nigh horse caught the full weight on his collar. It proceeded towards them at a crawling pace.

"By Crimus, Leo 's right."

Ralph grunted, "It 's the stone all right. There comes another wagon."

A second team had taken the place of the first on the turn. It was just lurching off the highway; and now it, too, came towards them out of the perspective.

"Where 'll we unload it?"

"The upper side," Ralph said.

"That 's Driscoll on the first wagon," a man said. Bascom looked over his shoulder. The first wagon creaked up to them, and as the traces slackened they could hear the panting of the team. Ralph examined the stone. "What do you think of it?" he asked Driscoll.

The man took his clubfoot from the footrest, tossed the reins to the ground, and heaved himself down. "Pretty good," he said. "But they 're too big to handle easy."

His brown eyes met Ralph's gleaming ones directly, then lowered impersonally to his stick. "I expect that 's so," Ralph said. "This won't be an easy barn to build."

"No," said Pete round his shoulder. "It 's too big for that."

He called for men to help the unloading. Bascom dropped his shovel. He had seen the two girls coming across the meadow

— Joan and Rose. The shoveling down with the men had become suddenly irksome. He had heard Driscoll's name. He vaulted on to the wagon and stood straight on the top stone, waiting till Driscoll should climb on after removing the tailboard. Sweat had soaked his shirt collar and stained the edges of his hair. His cheeks were burning, as red as his mouth with which he grinned down at Driscoll. He wished to try his strength with him against the same stone.

"Good morning, Driscoll."

"Morning." There was no knowing from the man's voice. He climbed back awkwardly. He was as tall as Bascom, but thinner, and his dark hair and eyes and his clubfoot threw them into a contrast which was pleasing to the younger man. They hooked their fingers under the end rock and heaved it up. It tottered on end, crunched the ends of the box, and sank half its thickness into the wet sod. The water oozed out round the edge.

Bascom sprang to the next, but he found Driscoll with him, and when he turned his gaze he met the man's eyes boring into his. The lids of both pairs dropped and the arms heaved on the stone. Again Bascom sprang to the next, but again he found Driscoll with him. It seemed that they had tacitly agreed to try their strength, and the last stone found them lifting as one.

Their chests heaved as they straightened up.

"Heavy handling," Bascom said. Driscoll nodded. They stood on the wagon looking at each other, and there was the element of measurement in their gaze. Then a voice asked, "You look so hot. Don't you want a drink?"

The girls were looking up, side by side, arms stretching up the buckets — Joan's eyes anxious, Rose's smiling and shining. Bascom took the bucket from her. "My sister-in-law, Driscoll. You 've met Joan."

Both girls said good-morning. Joan's vague stare drifted to the farmer's face. He took off his shapeless hat and said, "How do you do?" His sad eyes went to Bascom's flushed cheeks, then to Rose's. A pretty pair, they seemed to say. Then they came back to Joan. The violet-checked dress hung loose

from her bony shoulders, and lifted at the sides, showing homely man's boots. Suddenly he smiled, but the sadness was still in his eyes; and she smiled back, her wide mouth awkwardly tremulous.

The men gulped the cold drink slowly. Driscoll wiped his mouth and put on the tailboard. "Thanks," he said. His clubfoot rapped on the tire as he climbed back over the front wheel and started his horses.

"Is n't it too bad, Bascom," Joan said. "His poor foot."

He put his arm round her, and gave Rose a smile over her head. She looked well: her pink dress set off the black curls caught in a cluster at the back of her head; her red lips were parted over her even white teeth; he could see her breast arch as she breathed. "Where 'd the old man go?" he asked Joan.

"To the farmhouse. He 's talking to Nance."

Another wagon had been emptied. Now the team took it past them on the eight-mile, uphill pull to Collinsville.

Bascom patted Joan's shoulder. "Give the men a drink," he said, and he asked Rose, "Can't I carry the bucket for you? It 's heavy."

"No, thanks," she said. "You 'd better be digging."

He obeyed her, but he took a picture of her flushed cheeks with him. Leo was grunting as he dug beside him. "Driscoll." His puzzled eyes found Bascom's for an instant. "Such a clumsy foot. But he 's handy with his hands. Young Samuel bought a rifle last week. He wanted to try it. But he did n't shoot good. Uncle George said, 'Leave Driscoll see.' Driscoll took it. There was a woodchuck with his nose out of a hole down by the river. A hundred paces the way I 'd walk it. Just his tip, the size of a fip, that was what Pete called the mark. Driscoll aimed and shot, bang, without hardly touching the stock to his shoulder. There were n't no fly of dirt. Just bang, and he said, 'It 's a good gun.' We thought he 'd missed, but it was a clean shot right up the nose. Don't seem natural a man with a foot like his 'n should be so handy, does it?"

"No," said Bascom, glancing over his shoulder. He could see Driscoll's wagon turning on to the main road.

"Me, I can hammer a nail, or lift a shovel," — the load, twice what Bascom carried, shot high from the tip, — "but I can't figure out his being so handy that way."

He grunted and Bascom caught the rhythm of his shoveling. He forgot Pearl, he forgot Driscoll; as he labored he seemed but one of the workers, and his face shone with sweat.

The white-horse weather vane on the farmhouse flagpole changed abruptly to the northwest. There was a touch of cold wind against their faces. The swing of their arms quickened, and the manes of the horses were fluttered forward as they turned. The sunlight seemed to recede in a white glitter and slate-grey clouds rolled over the northern sky line. Bascom looked up.

Rose stood beside him, waiting for Joan. She was looking toward the farmhouse. The old man was sitting there on the stoop, in a rocking-chair, his red waistcoat making a splash of color against the white wall. By his shoulder an old woman in a yellow flannel petticoat was standing and polishing a saucepan with a rag.

"Who 's that?"

"Nance," Bascom said. "She was in the hall to see you last night. The old man likes to talk to her. She nursed me and Mother took Henry. Father wants to see you this morning. I guess he 's coming down now."

The old man was getting up. Behind them another wagon brought its load to the barn.

At their feet the hole was growing deeper. Joan came up to them, her bonnet, hanging on her shoulders, fidgeting with the wind. Her eyes were on the pile of pearl-grey blocks — then she glanced at the pit they were digging.

"All the beautiful stone," she said. She looked as if she might cry.

2

When old Ralph left the men at their first work, he went straight to the farmhouse. Nance was standing on the porch, a bare arm against an upright, the welted hand holding tight.

A breath of wind lifted her yellow petticoat towards him and he had a glimpse of her flat bony ankles and bare feet in carpet slippers. She looked down on his shoulders as he came up the steps, and chuckled, letting the wind blow.

"Getting older all the while, Ralph." She poked a wisp of grey hair back into place. "Guess you mind when they looked different, but they ain't enough more to make me care."

He grunted, and she pulled up the petticoat to take a look at the ankles herself. "Ain't shapely and ain't smooth, and time was they was both."

"Get me a chair," he grunted gruffly.

She brought out a rocker to set by the door. It creaked as he sat down. He leaned forward, his hands on the knob of his stick, his chin on the heavy knuckles. The wide hat shaded his eyes, and Nance, standing beside him, saw only the thick back and jutting knees. She smiled to herself; the wrinkles were drawn from her mouth and for a whisper it was young.

"It 's funny," she remarked half-aloud, without feeling, "a man like you gets old without no show, and a woman like me gets weazened."

"Yeanh." He had n't listened to her and she knew it.

"You never give suck."

Together they watched the plough like silver and the earth turned to the sun. The men's shovels rose and fell. Driscoll's wagon was being unloaded, the two men stooping like ants for the heavy stone. Nearest was Bascom, his hair bright in the sun. Both men straightened up to greet the girls with their buckets. Joan lifted hers easily, but the two old people could see Rose's back stiff under the dress.

"She 's soft yet," Nance said.

"She 's a fine-looking girl," Ralph said. "Even if she is a minister's daughter."

"Yes."

Ralph studied her carefully. The northwest wind had taken hold of her clothes. She had good points: she stood straight; she was flat-stomached and broad-hipped; but her height was in proportion and her lines well shaped. Her neck carried her head high and she kept her chin up — he had noticed

that the evening before. She had spunk in her innards, he said to himself; she 'd breed well. He remembered her flush last night; by gander, she 'd be a sporting wife for any man! Looking at her now with her face lifted to Bascom's, it came upon him in a shot that they went well together. Fair and dark, well-graded size, they made a pair.

He and Nance watched a while in silence. The shadows of the clouds came down the hills with a swoop and crossed the meadows swift as hawks, and the wind stirred up bright patches on the river.

"Bascom likes her," Nance said suddenly.

"What do you think that for, Nance?"

"He was working on that stone, but all the time he knew she was coming across the meadow."

The old man grunted. Nance was quick. "Yeanh."

"Joan would have give him her bucket to drink out of, but she edged in handily. You would hardly notice. I wonder if he 's caught her."

The old man blew out his breath through his nose with a snort. Nance went on, "So he has n't just said hello to her. They 've got something together."

Ralph twisted his head to peer up at her under his hat brim. The glow of aliveness that made the brown of her eyes so striking was burning now.

"She 's hardly married, Nance."

"No," said Nance. "She hardly is. She 's just a baby. And I 'll bet Henry made love to her with letters!" Her voice had a grim scorn.

The old man let loose.

"He 's all the time writing letters. Letters and gardening. If he could raise corn like his hollyhocks, he 'd have something to talk about. He don't care about the barn. There 's Bascom taking his lick at it. But Henry 's got brains."

"Yeanh?" She sniffed.

"But he goes to writing letters or goes to literary meeting in Sheriffville. There 's the Sheriffs up there and the Merediths and Carneys. They take him in, but they never took me in or my wife. They never called on us. We got our money and

they did n't then either, unless it was something they wanted me to get for the county out of Albany. But he goes up there just the same. All he wants now is his money so he can go away and live with gutless snipe like them. Wants my money for that!"

"Writing letters! That 's how he made love, I 'll bet." The old woman gave one of her thin grins. "You did n't do it that way. Don't I know?"

Ralph raised a hand from his stick, balled it into a fist, and studied the knuckles.

"You were a good girl, Nance."

"Bascom won't make love that way, either. I nursed him. Their Ma could n't suck them both and picked Henry. And this girl 's never had love made to her. I saw it last night." She added half to herself, "If Bascom wants her, he 'll pick her clean easy."

The blood rushed to the old man's face.

"Nance, you keep shut on that! She 's Henry's wife. She 's the kind hangs straight. You don't know them."

The old woman scowled.

"She has n't seen Bascom's kind," she said sullenly, argumentatively.

He shuffled his hams uneasily.

"Look at her now," Nance exclaimed. "How Henry got her we don't know, but she was n't built for him."

Ralph looked.

Beside the wheel of Driscoll's wagon, Rose's pink dress fluttered and her skirts whipped behind her so stiffly that she gave the impression of leaning against the wind's thrust. Bascom stood with his arm about Joan, his eyes on Henry's wife. The old man glanced quickly backward. Old Nance's head turned sharp toward him; their eyes met and held each other. Hers were still bright and warm — young the way they used to be. "He 's your boy, Ralph." He jerked his gaze back to the young people and began tapping the toes of his boots with the stick. Just as suddenly she disappeared into the house. When she came out she was carelessly polishing a pan with a rag. A slight twitching caught his shoulders.

"She 's excited with that barn," he said quietly. "She 's a fine girl."

"Yeanh, she 's good flesh."

"Bascom 's took somewhere else again," he said to reassure himself.

Nance nodded. "So was you a lot of times." She could have said where Bascom was taken, but she did not. However, her eyes went suddenly to Driscoll's wagon, disappearing at the main road.

"Not there!" The old man became moody. "It 's bad luck our monkeying with Driscoll." She did not give any sign. A frown drew his brows close.

"I 've got to see Rose," he said suddenly. "She 's mistress here now. And she 's strange here. It 'll be hard, and I want to give her a start. Don't you start giving her trouble, Nance."

"If she leaves me be, I won't bother her," the old woman said.

"She will."

"I think she 's all right, too," said the old woman. "She 's been nice to poor Joan."

"Yes."

They watched the two girls moving with their buckets among the men, now and then pausing to chat. Joan looked happy.

"She 'll take hold hard," Ralph said. "Look at her already. By gander, I wish Henry and Bascom would do like that."

"*I* won't bother her," Nance said. "But she 'll have to wrastle with that Brinley woman."

She stood by herself, her eyes on his broad back. The muscles about her mouth relaxed and her face was overhung with wrinkles. The wind, too, had fingered loose her hair, and it straggled about her cheeks. She looked old, a little forlorn; but her back was still straight and her eyes retained their warmth. Her lips moved. She said to herself, "I lost you when you got married, Ralph. But I got Bascom out of it. He 's mine."

Her hand went on mechanically polishing the gleaming saucepan.

"I did n't go off like the rest, and I 'm still here." Her face became savage. "I can hold on. I 've got to look out for Bascom. He 's like Ralph, but he has n't the sense. He 's got more heart for people, poor boy. He might get hurt. I 'll have to talk to that girl."

She smiled suddenly at the old man's back. "Building him a barn," she said, almost tenderly, as if she spoke of a child.

Rose, waiting the old man's approach with Bascom and Joan, could have no inkling of the old pair's conversation. But she had a queer feeling that they had been talking about her. Even now, as the old man came straight towards her, striking his stick into the ground at each strike, she saw the old woman also approaching her with her eyes.

Bascom grinned at her tense face.

"Don't let him buffalo you, Rose. Hold on tight and don't say a thing."

She granted him a smile of gratitude; then turned to the old man. He stood close to her, breathing deeply and evenly.

"Good morning, Rose."

"Good morning, Mr. Wilder."

They surveyed each other carefully, the big old man leaning on his stick, the slight girl holding her bucket with both hands against her knees. Then he came straight to business. "I want to talk with you, Rose, alone. You 'll need to know things, and it 's better for me to tell you than the servants." (She thought, "Mrs. Brinley," and counted a point in her favor.) "Eleven o'clock in my office. They 'll show you where at the house."

He had not consulted her convenience; he had selected the time and the place and expected her to come to heel. Well, she would, for she had no reasonable excuse, and she recognized the necessity of the adjustment. Suddenly she was older. The barn had ceased to be exciting play at watching the men, and giving them drinks. She felt the ground under her feet and she knew she must make a place for them here. It was curious, though she did not consider it at the moment, that she did not think of Henry.

"That would be very convenient for me," she said stiffly.

He gave her a comical short bow, and she smiled. Without expecting to she had won another point; and she could see that he was unaware of having granted it. It had been the tone of her voice. For an instant she again wondered what sort of woman the owner of the monogram on the heavy silver might have been.

The old man was smiling at her. "You 've come down to see the work? Doing your lick, too." His heavy voice grew vibrant. "Maybe Joan 's told you. I 'm building a new barn."

They all turned to the slope. The heavy chestnut team was hitched to the scoop now. It went down quick and heavy and it returned to the top slow and light. The tall farmer, Harrow, was holding the reins, and Pete, who had buckled to work at last, held the handles, throwing his small weight mightily to pick the load, his thin legs scampering to keep up. Dan said good-morning to Rose when he came up to her, and she gave him a full smile.

"Yes, ma'am," said Pete, "it 's going to be a big barn Mr. Wilder 's building." He pointed. "As big as that."

The ground showed the digging. There was an outline of the barn.

3

Some men are known by their works; in others the work is the product of a moment behind which the real man is obscured. Of her father-in-law Rose had no real way of telling. She was not enough acquainted with farm life to see the implications of the barn. As she had passed the switchel round to the men, she had overheard snatches of talk. "It 'll take a year to build this barn." "Wilder 's gone clean crazy. There ain't hay enough in this county to fill such a barn." "He 's got the money to buy feed, so he don't care." She looked to Bascom to see if he overheard or answered such comments, but he appeared to be letting them pass. He did not seem to have a clear idea of the barn to rise; he was merely digging. To Joan it meant the pleasure of being useful to the men; she could let herself go.

Rose saw its shadow on the ground, sprawled out unevenly, beginning to bite its way into the earth. Pete, the carpenter, ran here and there, all bustle. He had a view of the timbers to grow. It was bread for him, and money in the bank. She could not understand the attitude of the men. For them also it meant money, but they appeared to resent it. Bascom explained, when she asked him. "They 're worrying about the crops. If it was a regular raising they 'd make a party of it; but it 's too big to make a raising of. They 've come because they don't dare not to." His voice held momentary pride. "The old man 's got them. He has mortgages on their farms."

The farmer, Dan Harrow, speaking slow words to the big team, alone of the men worked with a true feeling for the labor's purpose. She could see it shining in his eyes. They had a greenish light that showed its color at a distance. He moved deliberately like the big horses, knees slightly bent, taking long strides easily and wasting no effort. When she offered him the pail he dropped the reins and stood beside her, surveying the shape in the earth. He held the dipper to his mouth and drank slowly. His face was not wet, but small patches of sweat had stained his shirt under his arms. He looked young; his mouth seemed in repose, and when he spoke the lips moved stiffly, as if unused to speech. She thought, "He 's as good-looking as Bascom. I wonder why he is n't married." Aloud she said, "You 've made a good start."

He said, "Yeanh."

"Do you run the farm yourself?"

"Under Mr. Wilder's orders." Then he added, "Mostly now he lets me go ahead. We 've had good luck — all but the old barn burning."

"How did that happen?"

"It happened at night in March. I guess somebody set a fire. I heard the cattle bellering and went to get them out."

"Who could have set it?"

"Somebody. There 's some don't like Mr. Wilder."

"Oh. How dreadful! Were any of the cattle burned?"

"No ma'am, we got them all out except Prince."

"Prince?"

"He was an old black horse I had — Mr. Wilder let me keep him. I had him on the canal."

He spoke without visible emotion.

"What a shame!"

"He was in the end stall and when I went back for him the mow had dropped in between us."

It closed a chapter. "This is a good team. I broke them myself."

"What are their names?"

"Rob and Roy. Mr. Wilder named them. Rob 's the one with the two white stockings."

"They are fine-looking."

"Yeanh. I like heavy horses."

She said, taking up the bucket, which was nearly empty, "I think it 's beautiful here."

"Yes, ma'am."

She saw his eyes sweep the flatland, avoiding the hills.

"Were you born here, Dan?"

He was used to people using his first name and was not surprised at her doing so. She had felt a moment's doubt, for she knew he could not be classed as a servant.

He let his eyes cross the valley.

"I was born on Tug Hill, that one, only further south. You can see there 's still snow on it."

"Oh."

They were silent a moment; their gaze reverted to the shape of the barn.

"I wonder Mr. Wilder is n't afraid this one will get burned too."

"I 'll let the dog loose nights. And when it 's done we 'll keep Bascom's bitch here too. People are scared of her."

"Still, it 's a lot of money in a barn, is n't it?"

He did not answer her question. He said, "There 's the cattle and the land. Mr. Wilder 's cleared this land and made it farm. We want more cattle, a dairy."

"Oh." Then, "Won't it be wonderful with the cattle in it, the first night?"

His eyes shone. He turned to her and smiled. It was a sweet

smile, she said to herself. "I 'd better be getting back to it," he said, and spoke to the horses. Rose took up her pail, saw Pete seize the handles of the scoop again and the work go on. She started back to the house. It was past ten and for a space she wanted to be alone.

Her feet followed the narrow little path, and the meadows stretched about her, flat and grey, with only a hint of green, almost more to be caught in the wet-earth smell than seen with the eye. Her shadow in the little path was short; the voices of the men working died behind her; the northwest wind pushed against her steadily, surrounding her with a feeling of space, as if she alone, a tiny figure, moved in the great valley.

She went slowly, feeling her muscles weary. It annoyed her to have been caught so easily by new excitement. The spirit of the old man's work had taken her body and soul for half the morning; she had found herself working among people whom she had never seen before last night as if she belonged with them. A pang swept her as she realized that these were the things Henry disliked. "Love, honor, and obey." She had not thought of him once since leaving the house.

Full of contrition, she thought of him now, and looked up from the path. By the edge of the grove, his garden lay marked by borders of daffodils. They were astir with the wind, and the sunlight glanced over them in waves of bright yellow. In the midst of them she saw Henry working on his knees. She turned aside from the path.

He did not look up until her shadow came between his hands. She could not have imagined him as he now was, in old clothes, the trousers white with dried earth, his hands black with new soil.

The greeting on his face changed suddenly.

"Look out."

He was looking behind her. Rose turned.

A dog which had been walking at her heels stopped still. Rose had never seen a bigger dog.

"What a beauty!"

The sun glistened on the smooth white coat, tracing the flat muscles in the lank body. The hound stood at ease, tail half down. Instinctively Rose dropped her hand. "Look out!" Henry shouted. "She 's savage!" But the hand was already on the bitch's head. The tail came up taut, like a half-bent bow; then the nose raised, ears dropped, and the tail sank back, wagging faintly in a typical hound's greeting.

Henry stood beside her gripping a hoe.

"Good Lord, Rose, she might have bitten you."

"Oh, no. I like dogs. What 's her name?"

"Juno. She 's Bascom's, and she does n't like anyone else but Joan, though she does n't bother the family. She 's scared of the old man, but no one else, and she won't have anything to do with me."

He put out his hands. The head did not stir from Rose's fingers, but the back hair lifted slowly, line after line, and the tail stiffened. Rose glanced down to see the loose lips drawn back, baring heavy teeth set in grey gums.

"See?" Henry stepped back. Instantly the bitch relaxed and turned her eyes to Rose's.

"She has lovely eyes."

"She 's taken a liking to you," Henry said with a slightly bitter note. "But it 's a good thing, I guess. She 's mauled some strangers badly. I don't know why the old man won't have her shot. He does n't like her."

"She 's such a beauty."

"Well, perhaps. She 's big enough. Like this barn. Have you seen it marked off?"

"Yes. I just got back. I took down switchel for the men."

"You ought n't to be doing that. There are women paid for that kind of work."

"Joan was going."

"She likes it."

"Well, so did I."

"Oh, if you like it." His small mouth shut tight.

"I don't see how anyone could help getting excited, Henry. It 's going to be such a wonderful thing."

"When you 've been cooped up here as long as I have,

maybe you won't think so," he said bitterly. "I thought the old man would lose interest in the farm when the old barn burned. But Harrow must have got after him. He has his living to look out for."

"Oh, no. He would n't do it just for that."

"What do you know about him? It 's natural, anyway. He has a soft job."

"I don't think so."

"That 's no reason why I should get enthusiastic didders, is it?"

"Well, I don't see why I should n't take an interest. I 'm going to live here. We 're living on your father. It is not that I 'm trying to get away from you, Henry, but I ought to know what 's going on here."

"I don't see why. Father never wants us to get away."

"I 'll go away if you want to. I don't mind being poor. I 'm used to it. Why don't you get a job somewhere?"

"Where could I go?" he asked frantically. "What could I do for a living?"

"Work," she said, an unaccustomed dryness in her voice. "That 's what your father 's done."

He flushed.

"I 'm sorry, Henry."

She had an instant vision of his real trouble. He recognized his own incompetence and timidity. He had grown dependent on the old man and the place. He wished to break free, but he had been held so long that the instinct was dead in him. At the moment the place appealed to her — the wide valley, the great forest, in the midst of it a man's domain. But she was able to see with his eyes. The huge old man walking here and there on his thick legs brutally expecting his son to take an interest in his own prison.

She saw that they had been on the edge of quarreling, and she remembered that she was his wife.

"How nice the flowers look," she said. "What a beautiful rosebush!"

At once the helplessness left his eyes. He turned to the flowers. It was a simple garden, showing little so early, but

the larkspur were pushing through the litter and the iris were up and the bleeding heart. Little edges of leaves showed on the roses. He led her round to the big bush in the middle.

"What color is it?"

"It 's a red one, Rose. Dark red. Mother planted it. I was seven when she died."

"Oh."

She went into his arms. He kissed her lightly, let his head fall against her arm. Looking over his shoulder, she saw the bitch sitting on her haunches regarding them. There was an odd knowledge in the brute's gaze.

Rose stroked Henry's head. She had wanted him to take her, and she found herself holding him. She felt that he might cry. Her face was pale and gentle. She saw her position now. He was still largely child, a sensitive boy, who had had no mother, and who needed one.

She waited. An odd feeling of standing outside of herself possessed her. Her eyes were on the barn and the miniature men across the great meadow; now and then the team appeared above the edge, and then went down again. The men were working there. The bitch seemed to feel the direction of her gaze. With strange silence she rose, turned, and trotted back. She would go to Bascom, sniff him, and lie down.

She said, after a few minutes, "Darling, I must go into the house now. I must talk to your father."

Henry straightened up. He took up his trowel shamefacedly.

"It 's going to be lovely in a month or so," she said. "I shall want to come down to see it every morning."

They smiled at each other. She took up the empty bucket and walked slowly towards the house.

4

"Come in." The old man's heavy voice answered her tap. She opened the door to his office and stepped in. He was sitting in a straight-backed chair before the corner fireplace; an empty chair faced him. The room was poorly lighted by the one window. Outside the panes the sun could be seen

warm on the trees; inside it was cool, and the fire snapping the iron dogs gave a welcome heat. A monstrous oak writing table occupied the space by the window; it was covered with papers in a mess. A short copper pot held a multitude of quills, as though the old man found it difficult to have one comfortable to his fist. In a rack beside the fireplace hung half-a-dozen guns; Rose could see that they were well-oiled and clean — the only clean things in the room. About everything hung dust and the smell of dust.

On the stone hearth the fire made a trembling pool of bright light in which stood solidly the old man's boots; and tides of light rose to his knees which were clasped by his big hands. They cast arched shadows over his eyes, striking against his white hair.

He rose at her entrance and pointed out the other chair. "Sit down, Rose." He did not sit down again, but stood before the fire; she said nothing, but glanced round the walls. After the bright outdoor light it was hard for her eyes to make things out. There was a map over a bookcase, and a portrait hung over the mantel. She could see that it was a painting of a woman, but it was impossible for her to distinguish the features. She had only an awareness of a pair of live grey eyes.

When the old man spoke, he spoke slowly, as if it were difficult for him to say what he wished. But he startled her.

"You have married my boy, Rose, and you are my daughter." Before she could put herself on the defensive, he momentarily disarmed her. "It is too bad you have to be welcomed by a hard old man. Joan would do her best, but she is n't able. Henry's mother would have done it so well."

She lifted her eyes; he was looking at the portrait with a peculiar kind of helplessness, strangely resembling the expression she had seen in Henry's eyes in the garden. She would have lowered her eyes, but he caught them with his. Oddly enough, he was not disconcerted; rather he seemed to be seeking something of her.

"Perhaps you would like to look at her."

He took a candle from the mantel and lit it. As she stood beside him, he held it up to the canvas and they looked to-

gether. Rose saw a small woman seated in a red velvet chair. The background was an atrocious lavender. The woman was tiny, but she sat straight in her black dress. She was stiffly posed, her hands folded on a minute beaded reticule, and the third finger of her left hand was a trifle raised to show a huge ruby. It was an awful piece of painting — the body had no legitimate connection with the head.

The hair was an indeterminate brown, muddily laid on, but the small nose and wide mouth and strong small chin were clearly drawn if poorly painted. But by some queer accident the painter had given his sitter living eyes. They were large, grey, and alive, bright and wise, with a bit of sorrow and a slant of mischief; and they seemed to Rose now to be looking straight at her and the old man.

"I had it painted the year before Joan came," Ralph said. "You 'd hardly know she 'd had four children by that time, two of them twins. The girls came first; they 're married now and they 've both gone out West. They wanted to get away." He seemed to be lost in musing. "She was a devil of a girl when she was young. I saw her riding an unbroke colt in Western and I was n't easy till I had her, and then I found she 'd got me. I never was sorry for it, and I don't think she was."

His attention suddenly came back to Rose. "Can you see her well?"

"Yes," said Rose, "she must have been lovely."

"She was. She never changed."

He blew out the candle and set it on the mantel. "Sit down."

He sat opposite her.

"You can see how little she was. But she worked right with me until we 'd made this place. Then Joan came and she left."

His hands came back to his knees and deliberately closed on them. He sat erect, his head back, and Rose felt his eyes on her. His voice had hardened. Instinctively she set her shoulders against the back of her chair and raised her chin. They had come to business.

He said, "You can take your choice, Rose. You can sit back like Henry. Or if you can take hold, you can be mistress in my house."

She said, "Do you want me to take over the house?"

"Yes. I 'd like it."

"Very well," she said. "I 'll try."

She found her eyes drawn to the portrait, and seemed to see again the mischievous amusement in the grey eyes. They must have known how to handle a man.

"I won't do as well as she did. But I can learn."

"No," he said, " you won't do as well as she did. She ran the house for me. One winter when I was in the legislature she stayed here and ran the farm. She broke horses better than I did. She went up into the woods with me. But she was my wife, and I don't expect that much from you."

He looked her over. "You ought to make a man a good wife, though Henry won't call on you much to prove it. You can be what you like to him. I hope you 'll have a lot of children. You 're built so any man would want you to." Something in his eye made her blush. He grinned. "Never mind that. What you 'll have to do here is to keep the house going. You buy the food and keep an eye on the garden. I 'll help you at first and I 'll plant it this year ; Henry does n't care about vegetables. He has n't any notion of how a man can live. You see to setting the milk for cream and to making house butter. You 've got to feed six people regularly in front, five regularly out back, and any time I may bring in more. It 's a big house. I planned it so with my wife. We used to have a lot of people here all the time, even though the Sheriffville crowd never 'd come to see us. I have not had many since she died and the girls went. I 'm sick of people. But I don't care who you and Henry have in. Only I 'll give you advice. Don't accept other hospitality before you 've tried people out here."

He paused.

"I 'm off the track. I 've got some old servants here, left over from my wife's day, and they do pretty well. I 'd hate to have to get rid of them, but that 's up to you. Parchal Smith, he 's the butler, not much to look at, but he gets around the table and he can smoke bacon. That housekeeper 's got him so buffaloed he does n't know anything."

Rose said nothing.

"Mrs. Smith, his wife, is the cook. You 'll have your own notions about good cooking maybe."

"No," said Rose. "I don't know a great deal. She looks like a good cook and she gave us a good dinner last night."

"Well, I 'm glad you think so. I like her. The two upstairs women I don't know anything about, but they must be all right if that housekeeper can stand them, and they must be all wrong if they can stand her." He gave a dry grin.

"I 'll tell later about them."

"George, he 's the groom; he eats in the kitchen. He can take care of the stables well enough. You need n't have them on your mind. Now about buying. There is n't much beyond the flour and oil and salt and sugar and such kind of things. Most meat comes off the place. Harrow is n't very good with hens, so we generally buy eggs. I let old Uncle George — George Mose at the village — help pay off his mortgage interest that way. Some men may bring round fish. You do your own jellying and preserving and what not. Probably Mrs. Smith knows about that. You buy meat from Harrow. There 's pork, and there will be mutton. I 've got my sheep down at the next farm since the barn burned. There 's veal and beef. Some backwoodsman is generally bringing in game. Mrs. Smith will help you on what to pay."

He fell silent. They looked into the firelight. The shadow of the room all at once seemed cooler.

"What about Mrs. Brinley?" Rose asked.

He gave her a comical look. "She came on two years before my wife died. She 's brought up Joan."

"I don't think she 's very good for Joan."

"I suppose not, but how was I going to get anyone else? And I don't want to just fire her. I 'd like to, though, at that. She gets me sick with her proper fine ways." He laughed suddenly, throwing back his big head and filling the room with heavy sound. "She 's tried to get me to marry her for seventeen years, and she would n't have stopped at anything to do it. It 's lucky you turned up, Rose, or by God she 'd have worn me down! But I can't turn her out myself."

Rose saw that he was scared of the woman. At least he had no idea of how to handle her. He had been treating her like a man in this talk; the woman must have puzzled him. It gave Rose courage.

She suggested, "Why don't we keep her on a while? If she helps me at first, and she can, I guess — "

"Oh, yes, she knows the job well enough."

" — I can give her things to do. She won't like it, and maybe she 'll go herself."

"It 's better to fire her. I wash my hands of her, though. If she goes kind, I 'll give her a present. If not, be damned to her."

"Very well," said Rose. "I 'll try her."

The old man sat still, staring at his boots.

"You know," said Rose, "it might be better to keep her on. Suppose Henry should want to move away, it would be better to have her here."

He shot a quick look from under his black brows.

"You 're not thinking of it?"

"Not now. But Henry has talked of it sometimes."

"Not him. He would n't go. He would n't know how to take care of himself. Up here I let him complain and he has all the time he wants for reading and writing letters. I won't give him money to go away. Why should I?"

Rose's hands clasped in her lap, as if she were taking hold of her courage.

"Would n't you rather have him useful away from home than useless here?"

"No, I 'd rather have him useless here than useless away where other people would get a cockeyed idea about us. He 's got no sense, but he looks well enough here and he raises good flowers. And if he went away he 'd just get shocked."

"I think you 're mistaken."

"Perhaps you do; but he 's my son, and I know him."

The blood was up in the old man's face. Rose checked the words, "But I 'm his wife." She was honest enough to see how little she knew of actual fact. Before she could prove her

point she would have to know the old man better, and he had now put her all at sea.

He was saying, "Neither one of my sons are any good to me. Henry hates the place and he hates me. He won't have anything to do with the barn. Bascom does n't care a hang. He 'd like my money for a good time, and he 'll get himself into trouble as soon as he gets it. But he was more of a man at thirteen than Henry 'll be when he dies. And he 's a good-looking devil, is n't he?" He looked at her proudly, and saw her blush.

"Yes, he is."

"Poor Joan likes it, and she 's been a comfort. But she is n't any help."

He stopped, asked abruptly, "How old are you, Rose?"

"Twenty-one," she replied wonderingly.

He frowned. "When you came into the house I 'd have called you eighteen. This morning I 'd have called you thirty. *You* don't want to go away?"

She laughed, deliberately.

"I have n't been here a whole day yet. But so far I like it, Mr. Wilder."

"If you wanted to go . . ." He dropped the sentence.

"Yes?"

"No. Nothing. It 's going to be quite a barn, is n't it?"

She said, "Yes."

"I saw it had got you interested. It is going to be. Some say I 'm crazy to build such a barn." He let his big shoulders lean back. "They say it 's too big, but I came here when this side of the river was all woods and I saw every inch of this land cleared and splendid crops come on to it. The land needs cattle, and they need the barn. If it 's too big, I 'll get more farm land. When a man like me gets older, girl, he doesn't care for people. I 'm not afraid to die, but I 've got to do something. And that barn will stand a while."

He looked through the window.

"Maybe people will say who built it. That 's something."

He got to his feet.

"Anything you want, come to me. Don't be afraid to."

She glanced up at his head looming over her, and said, "No, I won't be. But there 's one thing. I wish you 'd tell Mrs. Brinley I 'm to take charge."

"All right."

He pulled a cord and a bell jangled upstairs, and another in the kitchen. In a minute, Parchal put his head in the door.

"Get Mrs. Brinley. Why did n't she answer herself? It 's her bell."

"She 's busy with the linen."

The old man roared, "Tell her to come to my office right off. Mrs. Henry wants to speak to her."

He grinned at Rose.

"I wish you had n't put it that way."

He scowled at her. "Why should n't I? It 's my house. And she hates to be rung for."

After a short silence, they heard the housekeeper's heels rapping sharply down the hall.

"Yes, Mr. Wilder."

"It 's not me that rang. It 's Mrs. Henry," the old man said with relish. "She 's mistress of the farm now and she 'll give you orders."

He showed them both into the hall; then stood in the door, watching. Rose felt that she was coming under fire. The woman had drawn up her thin figure. Her eyes burned, but the lids trembled, and her mouth curved over her sharp chin in a tight line.

"I should like to go over the house with you," Rose said distinctly. "I 'm sure you can help me a great deal, and I shall like that. Will you please give me the keys?"

She could see the ring of them hung in a clip at Mrs. Brinley's girdle. The woman's hand went mechanically to the keys. Rose felt sorry for her, so much tragedy hung in her eyes. Her life had ended for her, and for a moment the younger woman thought she would make a stormy exit from the house. Then she saw a light in the pale eyes that was at once calculating and sullen. The thin hand offered her the keys.

"These are the house keys."

Rose took them, a heavy bunch. Behind her back she heard the office door close quietly.

"Suppose we talk things over," she suggested. "Where would a quiet place be?"

There was a sniff hovering in the housekeeper's voice, but she managed to hold it back. "The parlor," she suggested.

Behind them the door opened again.

"There 's one thing," growled the old man's heavy voice. "I will have my breakfast sharp at quarter to eight. I won't stand its being late."

"Yes, I 'll see to it." Rose did not take her eyes off Mrs. Brinley as they went down the hall. She jingled the keys thoughtfully, unmindful of what the sound might mean to the other. It meant to her that she had found a foothold, and she wondered if she could keep it.

IV

RALPH'S BIRTHDAY

1

It was six o'clock. On the edge of the great meadow a line of light-grey stones made a sharp edge against the alder swamps. The foundation of the barn was in. The main beams over the cow stable lay in their sockets, solid eighteen-inch sticks, and already on the south end the timbers were beginning to rise — three sets of upright, with the crosspiece braced in.

The afternoon sun threw the shadows of these timbers far out over the swamp, and on one crosspiece the figures of two men made shadows like burrs clinging to a grass stalk. They were Pete and Leo filling their pipes after a day's work.

"Pretty good for to-day, Leo. You done fine with them uprights. I 'd hardly thought you and me could handle them together."

Leo looked down over his fat knees, past his feet dangling. He had taken off his shoes for a better grip, and his feet looked like brown shapeless hams, with the stubby toes a ridiculous single row of cloves along one end. It was dark in the bottom of the barn; the shadow lay like black water between the stone walls. He let the breeze touch his feet, and his toes wiggled.

"Yeanh," he said. He took Pete's spluttering match and lit his own pipe and sucked meditatively. Behind them the completed ramp rose well over their heads; beside him rested the end of the ladder by which he must climb down. He looked forward to the time when they could build a bridge from the ramp to the first rack of timbers and he could carry them in

on his shoulders and lower them into place for Pete to dowel home, instead of staggering them up and holding them at the foot like trees over his bent back.

"She 's commencing to show," Pete said. He kicked his heels together and spat down into the bottom. Leo cocked his head. Then he spat and they both listened. "A mammoth barn," Pete said. His bright eyes gleamed. It was still up there and good for getting your breath after the day was over. A man could see out over the whole valley. There was a steady muttering sound that increased in volume and receded in steady waves. "I wish haying was over," said the little man. He and Leo gazed out solemnly. The chestnut farm team were steadily circling the great meadow south of the road, and the hay fell neatly down before the cutter bar of the mowing machine. "That 's a great cutting engine, now, Leo. Look at it. It 'll save us time. We 'll have Dan back twice as quick with that jigger going. Ralph said he 'd lend it out on other farms and we 'd get some of the other men back quicker. See it cut into that hay there!" They watched a while. "Ain't it wonderful how men invent ideas! I would n't have discovered any such idea for myself," Pete said. It made him glow to think of all the wonderful ideas men had had. Leo said sombrely, tightening the muscles in his great forearm, "Yeanh. But a carpenter still has got to drive a nail himself." Pete snorted, "You ain't got no imagination, Leo, that 's what 's the matter with you, and it sours your inwards."

He turned away, picked up his hatchet, and started nimbly down the ladder. Leo twisted his big bulk round and followed him laboriously. The ladder creaked. Little curls of smoke popped out of his plump mouth and hung in the still air as he went down. The timbers stood bare, a touch of golden sunlight marking them.

Underneath, in the darkness of the stable, they put their tools away and placed the chest under canvas. To-morrow would be Sunday, and no work. The shavings rustling about their feet smelled slightly of pitch.

"Hurry up, Leo."

They climbed out round the ramp and started across the

meadows, following the road, Pete whistling a tune as he went, and Leo plodding, his big feet raising dust, swinging his shoes in his hand. When they came to the carriage house, they found George, the groom, showing an old man a mare.

Pete said, "Why, hello, Uncle George. Horse trading?"

The old man swung his white beard from side to side. His watery eyes came to Pete, then strayed back to the mare. "No, I ain't, young feller. I 've been bringing over eggs which Mrs. Henry asked me for."

"That 's quite a walk for an old man," said the carpenter.

"I 've got past feeling old," said Uncle George. "These days I just go along. And then some day I 'll stop. You don't know what old age is. There ain't nobody knows till they 've got past it, like me. It takes time to get around, but I get there as natural as ever. No, I ain't any use for horses. George, here, was showing me a mare."

The groom brought the mare up to Pete. Her black coat glistened. "Ain't she a dainty piece?" he asked proudly. "We got her for Mrs. Henry. She ain't had time to use her yet, but she will soon. She comes out every day and says to me, 'How 's Dainty, George?' And I says, 'Won't you look her over for yourself?' and she does and says, 'She looks good,' and now, don't she though?"

"She 's likely enough looking," Pete admitted.

Leo held out his big hand for the mare to sniff.

"You 'd better put your shoes on, Leo. The old boy don't like a foot like yours naked in the house." Pete looked sternly at his helper, who sat down and pulled the shoes on over his bare feet. The groom, with the mare looking over his crooked shoulder, watched the process. "Yeanh, a man ought to have his feet dressed, with a lady like her around to take notice."

"How does she like it?"

The groom picked up a straw and mumbled it thoughtfully between his lips. He spoke round it artfully: "Good. I 'd say good. And say, she 's took hold handsomely, too. We all like it. None of that sniff-you-lousy-pup way that house woman had."

"What 's become of her?" Uncle George asked. "I remem-

ber her when she come; let 's see, it was seventeen years ago. She was n't bad-looking for a young woman — " He pressed his beard down on his shirt with a welted hand. "No, not bad-looking. Some of us thought Ralph would have a throw at her after his wife died."

"Well, I guess not!" said the groom. "No, she just does sewing, and fancywork. I heard the old man talking about her to Mrs. Henry. 'Don't want to turn the old bitch off,' he said to her. 'Got her muzzled here,' he says, 'and for a stupid woman she has done a lot of work.' I don't think he 'd give a dang. Many times I guessed he 'd throw her out himself, but he did n't. He 's left it up to Mrs. Henry, and she 's too kind."

"I ain't seen her around much," said Pete.

"Been too busy. Been a lot for her to get the hang of, I reckon."

"That 's it. Has n't even had time to try out Dainty," the groom said. "She says to me, 'I don't know a lot about driving or riding, George, so I 'll have you take me with the team.' She will later, though. She 'll be dandy, too. Bascom's been after her all the time to try out Dainty."

"Yeanh?" Uncle George turned a calculating eye on the groom.

The mare made a snatch at his straw and he cuffed her gently back.

"Just like any girl, you are. Got a manger full of hay there in the barn and you want to take a man's only straw right off his mouth!" He eyed the men shrewdly. "He 's took a fancy to her just like all of us. Seems she belongs here more than Henry does. We don't see nothing of him."

"Yes," said Peter, "Bascom keeps right after her. He don't help so much on the barn now. Carries down cold drink to me and Leo for her. Both of them come down. He took her up on the ladder this afternoon and they set there a spell. Half an hour, pretty near, and we 'd forgot all about them till she called down to me to give them back the ladder. Leo, the big bezabor, had gone and took away the ladder."

Leo blushed. "Yeanh. How 'd I 've got up to dowel that crosspiece without no ladder?"

"You could have put it back."

"How 'd I 've come down, then?"

Pete snorted. "That 's the man I 've got to help me work. I grant he 's got heft; I grant he 's got power; I grant he 's willing — but I don't grant he 's got brains. He don't mean harm, the poor bezabor, but he 's twirly."

Leo listened with bent head.

"Yeanh," he said. "I did n't mean harm."

"She come down slick — she come down ahead of Bascom, real neat."

"She 's got pretty legs," Leo said.

Pete flushed. "What was you looking for? Ain't you got any decent feelings? To say a thing like that."

"I was up on that crosspiece waiting for the ladder to come back," Leo said; "you told me, Pete."

Pete rushed ahead. "They looked at each other some, and she kept speaking to me. 'It looks fine, Pete. My, how high it 's going to be.' 'Yes 'm,' says I, because that was right."

"I seen it across the meadow," said Uncle George suddenly. "It 's a handsome thing. I thought I 'd never be alive to see a barn like that. But I 'm past wondering."

"Well, we got to be getting back, Leo. Coming our way, Uncle George?"

The old man swayed his beard.

"I brought over some eggs Mrs. Henry 'd sent for. Don't generally come, but I thought maybe I 'd drop in on Ralph. It 's his birthday to-day. Let 's see. He 's seventy; and us old ones ought to stand close. He come over to see me in August last year. 'Uncle George,' he says, 'congratulations. You 're the oldest spry man I ever see. I don't know how old you be, but you look good,' he says, 'and I thought I 'd just drop in for greetings.' So I bring the eggs and then I just thought I 'd drop in for greetings. Bad times these be, and old men have got to hold on."

He got himself up from a bucket he had been sitting on and took his way with them carefully.

"Good night," they called over their shoulders. The groom and the mare had disappeared into the barn, but they heard

his voice saying good-night, and a horse's nicker from the stalls.

They rounded the drive abreast and went up the steps to the office door. "I 'll knock," said Uncle George. His eye had been caught by the brass knocker. He made an oddly childish figure, like a man out of a fairy tale, with his wide floppy hat and his white beard, his coat loose on his shoulders and the trousers tied round his boot tops with a piece of thong. He stretched out his old hand and lifted the knocker and let it fall. They all listened to the heavy thump. He did it again.

Ralph's voice said, "Come in."

"He 's inside," said Uncle George. He opened the door and stepped slowly across the threshold. Ralph was sitting behind his desk. He did not look up. "I 've got your money here, Pete. How 'd you make out to-day?"

"Good," said Pete. "Three uprights set and the cross-beams in."

"That sounds fine. I 'll be down Monday. I 've got a little party on to-night. My daughters are here from out West with their families, and we had to take them around."

They saw that he was dressed in his best black coat and a new stock. They had never seen so fine a waistcoat. It made a tremendous splash of color in the dark little room, bright yellow satin. He handed across two envelopes and a receipt which Pete signed with a flourish. "I have n't had time till now to tend to chores and I 'm hurrying up before dinner."

Uncle George had stood by the door, leaning on his stick, his watery blue eyes taking everything in. Now he said, "Hello, Ralph. Congratulations. You 're looking good."

Ralph looked up quickly and got to his feet.

"Why, hello, Uncle George! I did n't notice you come in. How are you?"

The old man said seriously, "Course you ain't my age, Ralph, but you 're getting on. I thought in bad times us old fellers ought to stand close, so I just come in for congratulations."

"Thanks," said Ralph. "It was fine of you to come. Set down, Uncle George."

"No," said the old man. "I don't figure on staying. I 'm going back with these boys. It gets dark nowadays and I like company, and I don't mind showing them the way."

"That 's right. But you ought to catch a breath with me. How about a drop of whiskey?"

"Well," said Uncle George, "it might n't be good for these boys, but you and me might share a little mite."

"No, no, they ought to drink. 'T is n't often they 'll have a chance."

Uncle George swung his beard soberly. "That 's honest truth, though you ain't near to my years, Ralph. 'T is n't often," he turned to Pete and Leo, "you 'll see two old men as old as we be, boys, standing up and drinking down like this."

He accepted a chair by the hearth, set his hat carefully behind his feet, his stick between his knees, and waited while Ralph took from a closet glasses and an ancient-looking bottle.

"Bad times," the old man observed. "And good likker. Times will change, but likker will be likker as long as a man has inwards."

Ralph said seriously: "Yes, it is bad times. I don't like the look of this election business, Uncle George. Everybody is clean crazy. Take Henry — he does n't know anything, but he reads the *Tribune* and that madman Greeley everybody thinks is so wonderful all the time, and he 's been spitting about abolition till I had to shut him up. They have n't any idea what war means. What do you think of the election?"

Uncle George took his glass and sniffed the whiskey.

"Who can tell? There 's new parties. Take this man Lincoln. He 's a Republican. Everybody else is a Republican up this way, seems like. And what is a Republican? I know a Whig and I know a Demycrat. But the Republican is new. They say the South won't dare do nothing. But I 'm going to vote Demycratic, even if Jackson is a Demycrat. Maybe he 's dead, I 've forgot. I can't keep track of every man. But I 'll tell you, Ralph, why an old Whig like me is going to be a Demycrat voter this fall. If Lincoln 's elected there 'll be war."

Pete said, "I don't see why, Uncle George."

The old man blew a breath through his whiskers. "A Demy-

crat can stand being licked by a Whig, but there ain't no man going to stand being licked by a Republican Wumpus."

Ralph nodded. "That 's sound sense."

The old fellow nodded his beard and turned to Pete and Leo. "A man can't get so old as I be without having sense in him. I 'm right."

He looked at Ralph.

"You and me knows. That 's why I wanted to congratulate you. Just dropped in. Old men like us ought to stand close. Not that you 're my age, Ralph, but you 're coming along pretty good."

He drank off his glass in one gulp.

"That 's likker."

He set down his glass and got up on his thin legs.

"Them boys is still swallering. Come along."

They followed him out and Ralph said good-night from the door. "Thanks for coming, Uncle George."

The old man waved his hand.

"Let 's take the short cut through the park."

"That 's private," Pete said.

"It 'll be all right with me along. I was with Ralph when he shot his first deer down there. Just a young lad he was. He won't care."

They went round the corner of the house. By the kitchen door Mrs. Smith was dressing trout. Over her shoulder they could see signs of active preparation — Parchal Smith putting plates to warm, and Rose doing something to a salad. She glanced out at them with a bright smile. Her skin had darkened to a rich brown and the heat of the kitchen had flushed her cheeks. Her sleeves were tucked back round her forearms and she had on a whispering big apron.

"Hello, Pete and Leo, who 's that with you?"

The old man took off his hat.

"I 'm Uncle George. I 'm the oldest man in High Falls and I 've dropped in on Ralph to give him greetings."

"Oh, that was nice," she said.

"Who 're you, ma'am?"

"I 'm Henry's wife, Rose."

He gave her a long look.

"A pretty girl, too. Seems like I have n't seen such a pretty girl since I was young."

She laughed, and Mrs. Smith laughed loudly.

The three went on down the path.

"Sounds different since that house woman's got where she belonged," Pete said.

"Well, that 's a pretty girl," said the old man. "They 've not had one there for a spell. It ought to set them all to going." He let out a deep breath. "You ought to look at her. There ain't any such now. Pretty girls was pretty in the old days, boys."

2

Pete had been right. The house sounded different since Mrs. Brinley's decline from power. It carried an air of comfortable good feeling. Even between Henry and the rest of the family, affairs moved amicably. He was out most of the day, absorbed with neighbors in political news. Bascom had been at work on the barn; something in the lining up of stones had caught his fancy and he was by way of becoming a mason of sorts. The old man tramped back and forth from his office to the barn. Rose did not see much of him. In the morning, as likely as not, he would have his favorite brown trotter on the cart and go down to the mill to see about the timbers. In the afternoon he walked in the woods.

He took these rambles ostensibly for regular exercise. "I don't want to get so I 'm tired just puttering about. I want to get good and tired." His vigorous old legs took him several miles; then, about sunset, he would find himself by chance, as he said, on one of the hills bordering the farm land, from which he might look down on the barn. He might be seen in some spot of the pasture, leaning both hands on his stick, staring out from under his wide hat brim with his dark grey eyes, his chin thrust forward. The complete absorption of his attitude would identify him as surely as his red waistcoat. . . .

One afternoon Pete had seen him as he climbed a ladder.

"I wonder what the old boy thinks about up there?" Bascom had said, "Cows." As he struggled with a ten-foot brace in the dark beside the wall, Leo's voice had come up to them. "These braces has an awful heft.". . .

Then he would come home — first spending an easy fifteen minutes on the farmhouse porch, exchanging sparse sentences with Nance, who would be getting Dan's supper. When Dan came in, the old man would ask him about the day's farm work. Then he would go home. If he were especially energetic, he went round by the Glen, and waited a few minutes looking down at the deer. The old buck Gregory was getting savage. Years there had lost him his shyness; but he still had a fire in his eye kept hot by his captivity. The old man thought, "He 's like me. I could n't tame him if I tried." Then he would go down deliberately into the park and walk up to the buck. Apparently the deer had not forgotten his carrying him in. He was not frightened of the old man, but he remembered his strength. Without offering fight, he stood warily. The old man did not attempt to touch the animal, but he would hold out a morsel of clover. He liked to see the deer's nostrils twitch. "You won't touch it, eh?" He would turn his back and walk away, carrying with him the rejected offering. It made him tingle to do this, and once safe on the bridge he would look down grinning. "When I get old, I 'll not dast to do that, you old brute! I 'll back off from you."

Generally, though, he chose to walk home to dinner with Bascom. He liked to have his son walking with him — they went stride for stride. It gave him no feeling of age; rather he took pride in Bascom as he might in a cherished belonging. He had produced him; Bascom was handsome. Sometimes he made trouble for Ralph; but it was worth it to have a boy like that who was your own. . . .

Seventy years old. He had heard from his daughters. Alice had written that she and Emily would be coming East together, the first time in ten years. Both their husbands had business in New York. They would make it a holiday trip and come together from Buffalo. It would bring them into Rome in time to make a side excursion to High Falls. "It will be

nice to be there for your birthday." Ralph had read the letter aloud at luncheon. He snorted. "Joe and Lewis wanted to come up too."

"I 'm getting on, you see," he said to Rose; "they don't want to get out of my mind."

"There won't be many of us," he read on, "and Mrs. Brinley can put the children somewhere together." ("You 'll have to put them into the back bedroom, Rose. They 're two girls — about eight, I guess.")

"We can't stay but one night." ("That 's something, anyway.")

Rose had said, "Why not have a party?"

"No. I don't want a party."

"Perhaps they would rather not," she agreed. "It would be hard on them to have just one day at home and have strangers here."

The old man had grinned.

"That 's so! Let 's have the Merrils in to dinner. I don't want anybody else. He 's been with me in lumber. He 's got sense. Better ask the minister."

He took a delight in being thus perverse. Rose had accepted the change of front in her favor; it would be easier for her.

She attended herself to the cleaning of the rooms and planned the dinner with care. One of the men from the village had brought in a mess of trout — she would have them after soup. A roast of veal. The garden had done well, the first peas would be ready. Salad. Raspberry cake.

At first the housekeeping had been an utter confusion; but with Mrs. Smith to help her she had begun now to find her way through the intricacies of dealing with the village and the people. She had not had time to get about much; she had had no chance to meet people. As yet she had not felt lonely.

Mrs. Brinley had offered her a problem. The woman had been carefully polite, but Rose felt her dislike. Luckily the servants stood firmly behind the new mistress. They liked her and were anxious to set her right, which they did tactfully.

"Perhaps it might be better—" "Mrs. Wilder used to think—" Mrs. Smith was adept at these suggestive approaches.

Rose found it fascinating. In her own small family she had helped her mother, but housekeeping there had been a never-ending process which they did themselves. Her father, a little quiet man with sad eyes, talked shyly to his children sometimes of the life to come; but it was to her mother that Rose constantly turned, and learned to help in the task of eking from their small income a daily living. They did the work themselves, even to the garden and the laundry. Once or twice they had been able to afford a girl to help, but always, after a few months, they had had to let her go again, dismissing her on any excuse, or, if there were none, swallowing their pride to tell her frankly why. Here she stood by herself, the fountainhead of wisdom, however she might err, taking a hand where it suited her fancy, and deputing work like a general. Already she had checked the preserve lists and begun to plan the preserving campaign. Reading her letters, her mother in Boston remarked, "Rose seems so happy. It sounds very impressive, my dear, quite like my mother's house."

Sitting now at the foot of the table, in a grey gown which she knew was becoming, she looked the hostess. The high-armed chair which might have dwarfed her seemed specially devised for setting her off. She did not let it claim her, but sat slightly forward, her back straight, giving no suggestion of stiffness, but supple with young strength. Her eyes took note of the table without appearing to do so. Without effort her figure personified graciousness.

On her right and left sat the husbands of her sisters-in-law. They seemed to her rather stodgy, middle-aged men, — one was already bald, — hardly the sort of men association with the Wilders would have led her to expect. Mr. Lewis Smallkins and Mr. Joseph Jones. They seemed bored by their visit; most of the time they had talked to each other, comparing prices and freightage for their businesses, which were wheat and hardware. She gathered that they were doing very well. Mr. Smallkins, in wheat, was optimistic. He had lis-

tened enthusiastically to Ralph's afternoon conversation. "War? Well it would be terrible, but I should n't mind it for wheat's sake." He had forgotten everything now, except his dinner. Rose could see glistening on his bald head a moisture indicating gustatory satisfaction. His plump face, wreathed in smiles and compliments to her between courses, became solemnly absorbed as soon as his plate was set before him. Mr. Jones, in hardware, an angular thin man with a dyspeptic complexion, disregarded his wife's signals from Ralph's right, and ate with a cavernous appetite. He did not address her a single remark during dinner.

Rose was thankful. She watched Parchal unostentatiously and perceived that he was getting a dazed sort of pleasure from the meal. She had got him a new black coat to wear; this was the first night of its appearance, and in making the most of it he at times forgot his more important duties. It had been a happy thought of hers to break in Lucy as a helper. One of the upstairs maids, she had proved smart, served quickly, and checked up Parchal.

Next down the table on her right was Joan in a new lavender frock. Rose had done up Joan's hair herself. She did not talk. She ate carefully, but there was less tenseness in her big hands, and now and then she would glance at Rose and find her smile. Opposite her, Mrs. Turbe, the minister's wife, a chatty woman, who was fond of the word "stupendous" and used it and as many others as she had at command. "What stupendous peas! Mr. Wilder, you must be proud." Rose wondered how the barn would affect her. Then Henry, next to her, and opposite him Mr. Merril. Mr. Merril looked and ate like a woodsman, but his manners were in no way offensive. His talk was homely, and to the point. A tall, stooping figure, he had bent over her and said, "I 'm glad to know you," and Rose had felt that he was, and liked him, as she did his wife, immediately. The latter was a little pert woman with a sly twinkle in her blue eyes, who was forever leading Mrs. Turbe up to her climactic word. She would turn her small face, red and bursting with merriment, to Rose whenever she achieved success. "I was an old friend of Mrs.

Wilder's," she had told Rose, "and I 'm delighted to see you, my dear. When you 've got your breath a little after taking hold here, come over and call on an old woman who has n't much left of manners or sense, but who does like somebody to drink her tea with." Ralph had told her that the Merrils were rich. "Comfortably well off. He 's a smart chap. Came here to open a hotel, but he decided to buy timber. He 's got some of the best and made most of his cash in tanning." Next to Henry was Mr. Turbe — it had been awkward, without enough women to go round, but Mr. Turbe and Henry were talking seriously. The minister had a broad face, drooping eyes. He delivered himself in interminable platitudes, but his chin was stubborn. Rose gathered that he was a dull man with good purposes. She had listened to his sermons. Next to Mr. Merril sat Bascom, facing Mrs. Merril, and engaging both with tall stories of fishing. He made a slashing figure among the others; he wore his blue coat stylishly, and the candles did not deaden his bright hair.

Ordinarily, in family, he sat next to her. Rose missed him. He had made himself attentive to her; his talk was amusing and bright; he had no ideas of any moment on any subject, but she took pleasure in feeling his blue eyes on her, and watching his mouth, half tender, half cruel. He had been eager to give her her riding lessons, and that afternoon, on the beam, she had promised to begin as soon as the relatives had left. Sitting up there with him, a feeling had come over her of being cut off from the world. Leo on the next beam and Pete below seemed of another mould. He had shown her the valley's sweep, and she had felt her eyes swim under the lids, a faint nausea, and an uncontrollable desire of her body to relax for the mere sake of letting go. She could not understand it now, seeing Henry crumbling bread under a sermon of the Reverend Mr. Turbe, but Bascom's hand touching hers had brought her back, tense, holding tight to the beam, her blood racing. Now suddenly Bascom's eyes were on hers, the lids half down, and she felt the same racing in her. The candles blurred and swam together into one light, and the blood came

to her cheeks. Emily, who was Mrs. Smallkins, was looking at her down the table's length. Rose collected herself.

The two sisters had greeted her coldly. Now, from time to time, from Ralph's right and left, they glanced at her. Rose could hear Ralph's heavy voice. He was telling them things about her, how well she managed. She could see that neither of them was enjoying herself. She felt that they had come to depreciate, and found themselves, now, helpless. They could pose as dutiful daughters, but their duty amounted to nothing.

Ralph was enjoying himself. He sat back in his chair, napkin tucked into his yellow waistcoat, his red face flushed with wine. A handsome old desperado.

He had left Rose alone, but she felt him continually watching her. Till now, she had been too absorbed in her new occupation to mind. Rather, his oversight had given her a sense of comfort — something to lean against, as in the case of Mrs. Brinley.

The former housekeeper no longer ate with the family. She had asked for her meals in her room, and she now ate in state from a tray that Lucy carried up to her at mealtimes. She sewed and read. At times she walked. At all times she was alone. There was no one to like her; and Rose's approaches, made in pity, were coldly rejected.

Activities of early summer, gardening for Henry, the barn for Bascom and Ralph, had let the family move smoothly in their own paths. At meals they had been considerate of Rose.

Two months of busy life — she had established herself. This party marked the climax. She had met the only women who might have claimed her place, and she saw that Wilder's daughters counted for nothing in the family. The question of her permanence did not occur to her. She was presiding in her own home.

That was what she felt, sitting at the table and listening to Mr. Smallkins's occasional remarks delivered through a mouthful. But she was not in her husband's home. Her security was not of his furnishing. Her satisfaction was the work of her own hands; and her success depended on the opinion of

the old man at the head of the table, his yellow waistcoat heaving over his heavy laughter, as he made play with the silver knife on his own birthday cake.

The guests poked at their pieces. "You must look carefully," Rose told them. Chatter and laughter marked the discoveries. "I 've got nothing," growled the old man. Through the pantry door, Rose could see the servants in the kitchen. Bascom was watching her as she opened her own cake. She was conscious of his gaze, but she did not acknowledge it. "Who 's got the ring?" cried Mrs. Merril, mischievously. "Yes," said Bascom. "Open yours, Rose. You and Joan are the only ones that have n't." His eyes played over her shoulders, the smooth dusky texture of them as they left the throat with the little bowls of shadow thrown by the candles overhead. "There is n't enough of the cake left to hold it."

Again Rose had that strange unsettled longing to relax. "I 've been going too hard at it," she thought. "What 's Nance doing in the kitchen?" She had caught sight of the old woman's queerly living brown eyes. Yes, there was something hard in her cake. She could feel it against the fork. "Maybe I 've got it," Joan said. Her voice was loud and excited. "Oh," she said suddenly. "It 's the thimble!" Complete tragedy overwhelmed her. She sat still and rigid, her homely face bent down, her eyelids swelling with tears.

"There 's only the ring left!" It was Bascom again. Why could n't poor Joan have had it, Rose thought bitterly; it would have pleased her so. Suddenly she was embarrassed. Of course, the money had gone, the threaded needle, there was only the ring left — that was what her fork was touching. She had an unaccountable aversion to laying it bare; but they all demanded it, a sudden accession of the party spirit sweeping them. And old Ralph said from the head of the table, "Come along, Rose," almost testily. Rose hated his heavy voice.

She made herself hold it up and she made herself smile. She was conscious of the light and their faces blurring; all but Bascom's — his blue eyes had found hers and they were laughing at her.

The table burst into laughter.

"How stupendous!" said Mrs. Turbe. "The bride to get the ring! How stupendous!"

Rose's eyes cleared. Henry looked slightly tense. In the pantry door Nance was surveying her speculatively. Joan, oblivious to all but her misfortune in the thimble, was on the point of weeping.

Suddenly Ralph said, "Let 's go into the other room."

Rose slipped over to Joan.

"It 's all nonsense, dear. See, I got the ring. That proves it."

"No, no, no. Nance says it 's true."

But Mrs. Turbe was still laughing. "Stupendous," she said for the third time.

V

BASCOM

1

Summer lay over the valley, giving long hot days, slightly misty, sweet with grass smells. The skies were deep blue and calm. What winds they had were light and warm and brought no rain. A good year for haying: Rose had seen it being pitched on to the wagons and from the wagons on to the great stacks, beside the old barn. There was no mow for the hay this year. But it came in dry and spicy, and the stacks gave springily under the men's feet.

The old man's daughters had gone. It was the second day after the birthday dinner; and Rose was on her black mare for the first time. Bascom on his dapple-grey rode at her side. He had taken out the mare for a half-hour's turn before putting Rose on to her, and she went at a sober walk.

"Let 's go out the back road," he had said.

So they went past the farm, the horses stepping through the shadows of the new barn's timbers. Leo and Pete looked down on them and said good-morning, and Rose waved back.

One of the last four loads of hay was coming across the meadow behind the big farm chestnuts, Dan standing atop, holding the reins with one hand. On the nearest stack Uncle George stood leaning on a fork waiting for it. Ralph had got the old man over to finish off the stacks. He remembered thatching; he could not remember where he had learned, or when, but his fingers had the gift. He stood now looking down, like the others, his white beard tied round his neck with a scarlet rag to keep the hayseeds out.

"By Cripus," he said to Dan, "if I was that girl's husband I 'd let no man teach her how to ride!"

"She won't need no teaching," Dan said. "That mare 's a pretty bit, and wise, too. Bascom 's warmed her and she 'll behave. And anyway, look at her hands."

The old man nodded. "Butterflies."

The black mare carried the bit easily, her neck arched, her small ears pricked. When Rose waved, she started single-footing.

"They look good together," Uncle George said. "They 've all four of them got blood. Hand me up a forkful, and don't hurry me, boy. This stack is lumpy and I 've got to finish it off smooth or the first blizzard 's going to carry it clear to Boonville." He got down on his knees, his hands combing out wisps, and with a smooth round stick began twisting home the thatch. For all the trembling of his fingers, the work went rapidly.

"You do it fine, Uncle," Dan said admiringly.

"Yeanh. But in the old days you 'd ought to see me go!" He looked up. "Holy! Holy! Look at that brute!"

Bascom's hound Juno came racing from the house, head out, tail down, her back arching and sinking to great bounds. As they watched she left the road to cut through an oat patch. The grain was heading out in a silvery sea and she breasted it like water. They saw her head and ears rising and lowering as she leaped.

"She 'll cut a swath," said the old man. In a moment she was free and with the horses. Her delighted barking rang back as she bounded stiff-legged under the nose of the grey mare, tail wagging in wide swipes. The horses trotted, grew smaller. In a minute they had rounded a low rise of ground and disappeared.

Though she had never been on close terms with a horse, Rose had ridden before, and when she went out to the carriage house and found the two mares waiting for them she felt no nervousness for the riding. Dainty greeted her like a friend, her brown eyes warm. The saddle Bascom had used on her had been changed for a sidesaddle, and George had rubbed her down so that each hair gleamed in place.

"Good morning, ma'am," he said to her. "How does she strike your eye?"

"She 's lovely, George!"

"Yeanh. She is. And she feels good. She knows she 's taking on her proper job."

He grinned at her over his twisted shoulder. It delighted him to see Rose about to use her special horse, which was his special pet; it suited his notions of fitness.

In spite of his flannel shirt and soiled barn boots he managed to look almost smart as he held the mare's head.

Bascom handed Rose up.

"We 'll have to have a block, George."

"Yeanh. I 've got me one dandy one. I took it off the wall one night, from the barn." He pointed a contemptuous thumb over his shoulder. "Pete was riled to beat the cars. He 'd got it for finishing off a window. But I did n't want to set it up till they got done with stone."

Bascom grinned.

"How is the stirrup?"

"It seems long."

"Better so," said Bascom.

George spat round his straw. "Yeanh. Better. Bascom knows everything about a horse, ma'am. So you stick to what he says. I taught him right."

He still held Dainty while Bascom swung up on Belle. Then he let them go with a last touch at the black mare's girth. "That 's a good saddle."

"Thank you, George." Rose gave him a smile.

He stood back and watched them proudly as they went down the meadow road. He had soaped and cleaned the old saddle till it shone with a soft gleam.

"My mother used to use that saddle," Bascom said.

It fitted Rose well. He dropped back to see the figure she made. Any graceful woman, with any spirit in her, is beautiful on a horse, and Rose, in her close-fitting blue jacket, was lovely. At the mare's first step she had taken the horse's life. They seemed one.

"You 've got good hands," Bascom said. "Remember, don't

pull on her mouth. She has a mouth like cream. If you pull, you 've lost her. It 's all she needs to get her head. If you don't pull, she has nothing to pull against. It 's a touch."

He brought Belle up at trot and showed her, with his own hands, a slight flutter on the reins that brought the grey mare into a walk as easily as a thistle seed alighting. Rose watched his slim long fingers. "As long as she 's like that on the bit, her weight 's under you and you can't be thrown. And *she* won't try to throw you. No horse ever had bad manners till a man hurt him."

Rose felt the mare's life under her. It gave a thrilling knowledge of the earth. She passed above the grass with a motion that, though her own, was not of her own effort, and she could look beyond the narrow pointed ears and see clearly into the distance. The horses she had ridden before were poor things to this, with mouths she had to fight. Now she moved with life itself.

They trotted when the hound joined them. She heard Bascom saying, "Down, down, Juno. Down, girl. Heel," and the bitch dropped behind to make little side excursions in the roadside grass as she loped easily. The new pace was more exciting, but Rose did not lose her sense of ease. With the heightened rising of her blood, confidence mounted. Dainty's head came up a trifle to meet the increased pace, and their balance was preserved. She looked abroad.

They had come on to a new farm, close to the river. On a little house stoop a woman was pumping glittering jerks of water into a washtub. She paused to watch them by, and the stream from the pump's mouth idled and died. In a meadow three men were mowing, one behind another, with the same motion, each man a little to the right, the scythes making bright clean swoops through the grass. A brown collie dog got up from a corner of the lot and came out to investigate. The hound met him with bared teeth a-grin and he slipped back through the fence on his own business.

The snake fences alongside the road zigzagged in and out of trees. Out of sight to the right they heard the occasional note of a cowbell. When they topped a low ridge, they saw the

valley stretching away before them, the Black River reflecting the sky, the willows edging the banks with their own grey-green.

As if she felt Rose's wish, Dainty stopped.

"It 's beautiful."

"Yes, it 's beautiful, Rose."

He spoke as if it made no impression on him. His blue eyes did not seem to see the particular contours of the land; it seemed to Rose that he might have said in the same tone, "The earth is beautiful." Glancing at him, his hair bare to the sun, the color high in his smooth cheeks, the full curved lips so soft over the down of brown beard that they might have been a woman's, she thought he might have used the same voice to say also, "Yes, I 'm beautiful." She remembered the touch of that beard when he had kissed her more than two months before.

She loved Henry as a dutiful wife should; it was evident to everyone in the house that she pleased him and took pains to do so. She let no one clean his study but herself; she went out to the garden with him each morning to gather flowers; she insisted on mending for him, though Mrs. Brinley had time to spare; and in the evenings when the family sat together before the glazed yellow tiles of the fireplace in the parlor and talked over the paper, they could feel her quiet influence over him. The old man had noticed it more than once, and checked himself in some remark to his son. She sat quietly with her work, half-smiling. Bascom often had watched her so. He wondered why she so seldom looked at him. Probably she was not conscious of avoiding him, her mind as a rule being occupied with the next day's duties. They were new to her, delightful and exacting in their strangeness. But to-day for the first time she began to feel herself mistress. She let herself away, the paces of her mare had carried her free and started her blood; the land was beautiful in the summer sunlight. In her girlhood there had been nothing to awaken her; there had been little in her marriage. Since her coming to the old man's house she had acquired a sense of her own strength, her own capacity for accomplishment; there lay in her, still

unopened, enormous emotional potentialities. To a practised eye something of this would have been evident as she sat straight in the saddle, her light hand holding the mare in an equal quiet, both together ready at a touch to burst into an activity that might be flight or pursuit.

Bascom, a shoulder behind on his lean grey mare, so read her. He could have no understanding of the threads of training and inherited instinct that might cross a passion now unloosed. His knowledge had been with country girls who looked toward him as they might in former ages have greeted their divinity. Probably at this moment he had no idea of approaching her. He had longed to take her riding because his instinct had been able to foretell to his heart the figure she would make upon a horse, her beauty set in motion — like watching the paces of a fine mare. Now, seeing her against the sky, with the valley going down from her mare's feet, her whole being absorbed by the air, he said suddenly, "Stay here. Belle needs a breather."

In the next instant the grey mare had sprung past Rose and was flying down the road. Rose felt her heart lift as the mare fled away; she heard a scrabble in the sand, and the hound flashed past, low to the ground. In a moment all three had disappeared. But in a moment again she saw them coming out on the road along the river bottom, still racing. She lost all consciousness of the view. Her entire attention was focused on the three in the distance. Her eyes picked up first one shape, then another; but she used all three to identify Bascom. In an instant, without premeditation, he had embodied in himself whatever she had found in her new way of living that excited and thrilled her.

When, in a quarter of an hour, he returned, his mare wet, her nostrils red coals, he met her eye with laughter. He was flushed, his nut-brown hair and beard were mussed by the wind, but the spark of life was fresh in him, as it was in the mare and in the bitch, who lay down to stretch her belly in the sand and look up at Rose, her pink tongue lolling from one corner of her mouth. The sight of them all three brought back to her, with a twinge of regret, Henry's desire to leave. Only

that morning he had spoken to her of writing Mr. May to see if there might be a position open in Syracuse for a master in Latin.

Bascom was saying, "That makes us feel better. Let 's go up this road. It brings out above the farm. That will give you three miles. Plenty for the first day."

They turned off into a narrow track through the woods. The mares took their way cleverly side by side and the bitch preceded them, nose in air.

"We need something like that every day," Bascom said. "Dainty 's a beauty, but she can't run like that."

Rose said nothing. The cool of the woods made her cheeks tingle after the hot sun. A forced sense of sleep entered her. In a yellow pool of sunlight under beeches by a small brook, she saw wasps darting in and out. The horses stooped to wet their muzzles and stood pressed together, fetlock deep in water. Rose then heard the whine the wasps made, a persistent buzzing that filled her until every part of her became aware of it. A twig had plucked loose part of her hair and it lay across her right shoulder. Bascom touched it.

"A long curl."

She felt herself leaning backward, against the touch of his arm. She saw his face against the green pattern of the leaves. The wasps whined, but the woods were still. She had a sudden peculiar vision of the dinner party two nights before, herself holding the ring up for them to see, and Bascom looking at her. Joan's weeping face; the thimble — to her the ring meant something.

Then she saw the leaves again and put up her whole soul with her mouth.

Bascom sat back in the saddle. "They 've had enough." The mares lifted their heads, and water dribbled back into the brook from their lips. They tasted their bits and went on. For a minute Rose rode without contact with her senses.

Then in an instant she had touched Dainty with her crop, and the mare went flying. Behind she could hear the grey mare's hoofs drumming the forest earth, but there was no room to pass, and she went on, her cheeks flaming.

Bascom called, "Easy. Slow her up. You don't want to bring her in dripping."

Rose knew she should stop and face him; but her self-confidence had been shaken. She was aware of an acknowledgment in her flight; but she did not care. The branches swept down at her as if they would strike, and she lifted her body toward them, but they went overhead with a whistle of the wind.

"Whoa!"

The ring in Bascom's voice brought the mare up. They stood on the verge of the farm land, the meadows spread out like squares of silk. A wind was playing with the oats, bending their heads down in waves. The last hayload by the stack stood like a thimble box, and Uncle George and Dan were midges. Pete and Leo moved like spiders in the distant web of the barn.

"George is paid to take care of the horses and cool them off when they come in hot; but only a fool brings in a lathered horse unless he has to."

Rose kept her face to the valley. Faintly the wind brought the ring of Leo's hammer. The sight and the sound soothed her.

Bascom held out his hand to touch her elbow. But he stopped short of the sleeve.

"I 'm sorry," he said. "I forgot. I won't again."

She looked at him coolly enough now. His eyes were sincere, but she could not help feeling them against her breast, as they sank over her body to return to his hands. Her voice held an excellent note of surprise.

"Oh? We wanted a run."

"Well," he said. "But we 'll walk them back."

They went down soberly side by side, and entered the meadow road. She felt again the shadow of the barn timbers passing over her. She had had an excursion into a new country; now she was back, she was safe, but when she dismounted the ground was strange to her feet.

Coming from the barn, George asked, "How was she?"

Rose said, "Sweet."

"Yeanh. So she is."

In the house Rose called Joan into her room.

"Help me, dear. Get out my pink dress. It 's nearly lunch time."

While she rearranged her hair, she asked over her shoulder, "What did Nance say about the ring? I saw you asking her."

Joan's face was solemn. "No. It means nothing."

Rose said, "Is that what she told you to say?"

"Yes, did you hear?"

"No, but she told you what it meant."

"She said I was n't to tell."

Rose switched round and kissed Joan. "Oh, please tell me; I want to know."

"No. No."

"Why not? It 's all nonsense, you know."

Joan's face was comically puzzled.

"You love me, don't you, dear? Please."

Joan hesitated, then she yielded to another kiss. "Nance says it means a lover always. That would n't be right with you."

Rose laughed. "You see it is nonsense. So don't worry about the thimble, will you?"

Joan smiled. "No, I had n't thought of it like that. It is nonsense."

"Of course, dear."

In the hall, Henry was coming down to lunch.

"Your color 's up. Where have you been all morning?"

Rose said, "Bascom took me riding."

2

There was one candle burning on the bureau; the single flame made a soft light against the wall, barely lighting the room. Lying on her side of the big bed, Rose watched Henry undressing. He left his clothes lying on the floor, pulled a nightshirt from the drawer, and plunged into it. It came down almost to his thin ankles.

Rose felt a slight impatience; Henry had a distaste for nakedness. On her honeymoon she had taken pleasure in his

refinement. It had agreed with her own training and it relieved her of a doubt.

To-night it irritated her. She felt the stiffness from her first ride — not severe, but giving her a consciousness of all parts of her body. She had stood before the mirror stretching, her hair shaken down behind her. Henry had been slow in coming — too slow. She wanted him then, desperately. She had listened for him at the door. She had stood by the window, behind the curtains, letting the night air flow over her. She had been restless; she still was restless, and afraid. If only Henry would come at once.

He had been fishing that afternoon up Beaver Brook and had come in late for dinner with a nice catch. The old man had growled impatiently at him; Henry had answered irritably. She had had to smooth things. Bascom had not helped her; he had sat throughout the meal, his eyes straying from his plate to her. Joan had watched them, dumbly, her homely face amazed. Rose wondered what she thought she saw.

Rose had been panicky during dinner. As soon as she could without rousing undue notice, she had come to her room. "I think I 'll go to bed. I 'm not used to riding." She had made it an invitation to her husband, but Henry had sat with his book. "Don't keep awake," he had said. She had broken custom to stoop over him and kiss him and say, "Good night, then, dear." But her whole heart cried, "Fool, fool, can't you see?"

He blew out the candle and left the two of them in darkness. She felt him entering the bed and even now put out her arms for him.

He said, "Still awake?"

"Dear."

"I thought you were tired."

"I was, but I 'm not now."

She closed her arms. "Henry."

"It 's late."

They were silent. She held up her mouth in the dark, waiting. . . .

Outside the clock struck eleven. Rose heard him say, "Darling." He was lying still beside her now, and she turned on her

back and put her hands under her head. She had had a measure of satisfaction, but she felt cold; she had given herself and not herself. Lying still, she began to feel again the stiffness of her ride, and she thought of the warmth. There was a buzzing in her head, like the whine of the wasps in the sunlit spot under the beeches. She thought of the pattern of the beech leaves: she wondered where Bascom was at this moment. The restlessness had only been lulled; it was with her again. She felt ashamed, and as an attempt at justification she asked Henry, "What are you thinking, dear?"

There was a chance in his answer. But he said sleepily, "I missed a good one under the falls — a beauty."

The clock in the hall struck twelve, and Rose still lay waking. The moonlight touched the pine branches beyond the window. It was quiet about the house. One last whippoorwill in the drive was going on with his song. She had not noticed when he began, but the notes came and came: she began to count: Fifty-seven, he must have repeated well over a hundred times. Suddenly the notes stumbled, came with a faster rhythm, as if he were trying to crowd in as many as possible before his breath gave out. Rose felt her heart bursting as she listened. He stopped and the utter stillness engulfed the room.

Her restlessness was overmastering. Almost without willing it, she found herself out of bed, standing at the window. Her heart yearned for the bird to recommence his song so that she might go back to her counting, but the night breathed without sound. She had a sense of some conspiracy outside.

Henry was sleeping his usual sound sleep, breathing evenly and quietly on his side, his head a small blur on the pillow.

Rose felt for her stockings, pulled them on, then an old pair of shoes. Her hands, possessed by urgency, fumbled. She threw an old long black cloak over her shoulders and pulled it tight about her throat, prisoning her hair. In a moment she was out on the drive, taking deep breaths.

The pines shadowed her on the grass, and the dew soaked through her shoes to cool her feet. The house loomed dark and square beside her. She started away, walking as if she must,

keeping to the grass lest her shoes scrape on the gravel. As she passed the carriage house at the edge of the grove, she heard the rattle of a halter rope. She pressed on until she found herself in the middle of the great meadow.

Here she could feel the night touching her. The waning moon was past the middle of the sky, which was clear and filled with large stars. A single cloud floated above Tug Hill on the eastern edge of the valley — a thin dark line outlined in silver.

The night was silent; but in the stubble of grasses through which she went she was aware of small sounds, as if the earth breathed. In themselves they were shy, almost furtive: the scurry of mice going back to their burrows with seeds, such tiny seeds that they had to make innumerable trips; a grasshopper crawling away from her toe; a fly struggling in a low-cast web; crickets beginning to practise for the autumn choruses. Together they made an all-pervading sound that filled the whole air to the stars.

Rose felt it entering her and stood still. While men slept, the earth went on with its work; and in the breathing to which she was listening, Rose became aware of a tremendous patience.

On the edge of the meadow the moon touched the timbers of the new barn. She went on until she could stand beside it. The beams no longer were the heavy things which she had seen the men struggling to set up; but in a corner of a door frame a spider was laboriously spinning. Dew made drops on his thread, and when he stopped to complete a joint, he had first to wipe the dew away with his hands. Pete and Leo and old Ralph had been fashioning something new; he was going on with an old device. In the morning it would be brushed away.

Rose stooped and went down the ladder to the barn floor. It was an empty well, offering no sign of stanchions or the destined herd, but open to the sky. In the darkest corner she sat down on the tool chest, and stared upward. The timbers etched in white climbed far overhead; through them she saw the moon, and beyond it, infinitely, the stars; and watching them she felt a motion in the sky.

She drew the cloak close about her knees. Suddenly she knew that she was not alone. She could not distinguish objects now on an earthly level, but she heard breathing close at hand. Oddly, she did not feel afraid; but her body grew tense with expectation.

It was fulfilled with a wet cold touch against her hand.

"Juno!" she whispered.

She felt the bitch wagging her tail and the warm tongue touched her once. "Lie down," she said softly, and the bitch obeyed, lying against her feet so that Rose felt her heart thumping. It gave her comfort, and she relaxed. It was still again in the barn, but her ears, attuned, continued to hear the earth breathing in the great meadow above her head.

She felt the bitch stiffen under her hand.

"Be quiet," her voice was commanding, but it held a suggestion of fear that the bitch caught. Rose heard her draw her tongue over her lips and felt her head drop.

Apparently she had not been the only one stirred by the night. She could hear footfalls coming through the grass on the meadow side of the barn. They went past the ramp, past the corner of the foundation over her head. Then the walker mounted the foundation wall and stood beside an upright, in Rose's view against the moon. It was Nance.

In a moment another shape joined her.

The old woman asked, "Bascom? Where 've you been?"

He laughed softly.

"Riding. I could n't sleep to-night."

"Yeanh. I don't suppose you saw Driscoll?"

"No."

"I don't suppose you knew he 'd gone to Rome to see a bonesetter about his foot?"

"No."

"Oh," she said after a while. "I suppose you did n't know."

"No," he said once more.

The old woman's voice held an unexpected tenderness. It was low and vibrant.

"You 're really my boy, Bascom, even if you be a Wilder. I nursed you when my boy died."

"Yes, Nance. You 're good to me. I told you the truth."

"Just riding?"

"Yes."

She sighed.

"You know I don't mind. And you can't blame them neither, with a boy like you. But you have n't any sense and Driscolls never was good for the Wilders. And you 're too kind to them, Bascom. You must n't make them love you so. It makes them think they 've got rights."

"That 's funny for you to say, Nance. You were like them."

"I was n't married. And I found a place here, did n't I?"

"Yes."

"Ralph never had to worry about me."

They said nothing for a moment.

Then Nance, "How did the girl ride?"

"Rose?"

"Yeanh."

"Fine." A flush of pleasure came over Rose. "She 's a beauty on a horse!"

"She 's too good-looking," said the old woman. "What did Henry have to bring her here for, anyway?"

"Why not?"

"You 're in love with her, ain't you?"

Rose caught her breath, and she saw him start. The old woman's jealous voice had carried the question home. Rose waited, holding her breath. His face was lifted, but she could see the moonlight only on his chin. He laughed softly for answer. The sound of it was sweet, barely audible, a part of the night-breathing of the earth.

Nance said, "Watch out, Bascom. This is n't like others."

"No, Nance, not like others."

"Oh, watch out, Bascom."

"It 's nothing so far, Nance. I won't let it go on." His voice dropped. "But it would be so easy."

"Don't."

"No." His voice was still soft. "I kissed her to-day, Nance. But she did n't like it."

Rose saw the old woman's body straighten. Her own heart

was pounding in her until she thought it would be heard and her hand was twisting itself tighter into the hound's collar.

"Did n't like it! She 's not that stuff. I 'm afraid of her. And she got the ring."

"Nonsense," he said. "I wonder if she knows."

"Joan told her."

"Oh."

They looked suddenly across the meadow.

"What 's the lantern doing?"

"I guess it 's your Pa. He 's probably coming down to see about his new Hereford. She 's due to-night."

"I 'll be getting back to the house."

"Good night."

"Good night, Nance."

They slipped away like ghosts.

Rose sat still. Her heart was turbulent. The dark of the barn was suffocating. The bitch slipped from her grasp and went out through the cattle entrance on the lower side. She sat alone.

Then again she heard footsteps, a heavy tread, and a lantern over her head gleamed down into the barn. The wall kept shadow enough to cover her, but shavings sprawling just beyond her feet shone white as worms.

"I came down to see how the cow was getting on, Dan, but I thought I saw someone over here. The bitch was nosing around."

It was Ralph's heavy voice.

"I don't see anything."

"I guess I did n't. How is she?"

"Dandy, Mr. Wilder. Come in half an hour ago."

"Bull? It would be our luck."

"No, a heifer calf."

The old man did not reply, but Rose heard his stick on the stone and could imagine him leaning on it.

"She 's cleaned good," Dan said.

"She 'll have her next down there," said the old man. "We 'll give her the north pen."

He looked down a while, then tramped away.

"I 'll look at her myself," he said. "Good night."

Dan stood alone. Now that the lantern light had gone, Rose craned her neck up to see him. His face showed clear in the moonlight. He was bare-headed, looking down.

"Is that you, Pearl?"

Rose started. He had seen her.

"Shh."

She had her wits about her. She must not be found out by the others. He must think she was here to meet him. Without considering the implication of such an interpretation, she said softly, "Come down, Dan."

He came quickly down the ladder.

"He 's gone in, Pearl."

"Who?"

He had been standing by the foot of the ladder. Now he came to her. "You 're not Pearl. Who are you?"

"I 'm Rose."

"Oh, I 'm sorry. I did n't mean to come in on you."

"It 's all right, Dan. I had to get air and I wanted to see the barn at night."

"Yeanh."

He seemed to understand, but he was ill at ease — she could tell by his voice, and she liked the sound of it.

"There 's a girl, Pearl, is in love with a man here. She asked me about him in the village yesterday and said she felt like coming over. I thought you might be her."

It seemed to make him easier, and she checked questions. But she wondered who the girl might be coming to see. Evidently it could not be Dan. Just now there were only Henry, Bascom, their father, the groom, and Parchal. It could not be Henry or the old man, and Parchal was unthinkable. Bascom seemed likeliest. But she said, "Don't tell anyone I was out, Dan?"

"No, I won't. I feel like this myself these nights. But you 'll be getting a chill here, ma'am. Had n't you better go in?"

"Has Mr. Wilder gone?"

He climbed the ladder.

"Yes," he said from the top, "he 's going back now."

She mounted after him. He did not offer to help her, and she was glad. She drew the cloak tight round her to conceal the nightgown. In the moonlight she could see his face. His eyes shone with excitement.

"Perhaps you 'd like to see the calf, ma'am."

"Yes."

They went in to the stable of the old barn under its temporary roof. A lantern was hanging on an upright beside a pen. Inside, a red cow mooed softly and nosed a wet shape. There was an odor of damp straw and a sweet cow smell that filled the air. Motes made a slight haze about the lantern. The cow's eyes shone softly with a copper light when she lifted her white face.

Dan went in and laid bare the shape, lying with clumsy head outstretched over bumpy knees.

Rose felt tired and her eyes grew hot with tears.

"She 's pretty."

"Yes."

Dan laid the head back.

"Good night," said Rose.

She slipped into bed, and the sheets were cool and comforting. Henry still slept. She bent above him. Her heart was suddenly filled to overflowing. He did not feel the tear on his face when she kissed him. She did it unconsciously, to satisfy the ache in her.

VI

HENRY

For a week, the routine on the farm had been unbroken. Rose's night adventure became daily more like a dream. She had taken three more rides on Dainty — two of them with Bascom, one alone. On neither occasion had he said or done anything to upset her poise. In the open air, with the horses trotting, she could scarcely believe that she had heard him rightly; his voice had been so low as he talked to Nance beside the barn.

At first she had waked to a feeling of horror, but within a day she had let this die; it could not mean that he was in love with her or she with him. They had been caught merely by a time and place, and she told herself that anyway she was in control of the situation. His behavior since had been evidence of it. She did not recognize the limits of her own experience; it had not yet occurred to her to question her control of herself.

The activities of daily life kept her too busy to brood. Like all emotional development taking place in the routine of farm life, there was no consciousness of the development. It works within one and bursts like a seed, full-sprung with life. Rose did not know.

It was a bright afternoon at the close of the month, and she was coming in from the garden, her arms loaded with pink phlox. Her mind was occupied with a question that had suddenly reappeared in her mind. Who was the girl Dan had spoken of in the barn that night? "Pearl" — she had not thought of the name since then. It would not do for her to ask questions. The name carried a tragic scent.

She met George coming out of the woodshed; he had a bridle on his arm. "George," she said severely.

He looked up as if he had not been aware of her approach, though she knew perfectly well that he had been trying to escape her. His small face held a comical expression of discovered guilt, but he managed to throw a falsely innocent look at her over his twisted shoulder.

"Will you want Dainty this afternoon, ma'am? It 's a fine day for riding, and the mare 's been talking about it all morning."

"George, what were you doing with that bridle in the kitchen?"

"Ma'am? Oh." He looked down to see what he held in his hand. "Oh, that? That 's Dainty's bridle, to be sure. I was just taking it out to the barn in case you would be wanting her this afternoon."

In spite of herself, Rose smiled. "Confess to me, George. You 've been using the pantry silver polish on that bit."

He glanced at the bit as if to refresh his memory. "Why, yes. I guess I was."

"Well, have n't I told you not to use the pantry polish? Did n't I give you a bar to take out to the barn?"

"Yes, ma'am. But you see, it was Dainty's. Parchal's rags is such elegant ones."

"But he uses them on the table silver."

"Yes, but Dainty 's got such a clean mouth, nobody could tell."

"I know." Rose's left brow wrinkled with exasperation — a habit of hers which seemed to delight the groom, who had been watching for it. She had been unable to break him of this nasty habit. This time she would be severe.

"Oh, ma'am," he said disarmingly. "It was that big ugly bitch of a Juno must have taken my rags, because I could n't find them, and I thought, 'Mrs. Henry will want to go riding to-day,' and I could n't let Dainty go out with dull bits, now, could I?" He watched her from the corners of his eyes. "When will you want her? I 've got the new block laid and you ought to try it."

Rose almost pouted. "Well, don't do it again, George. Promise."

"Yes, ma'am," he said with perfect docility.

"I can't have Dainty this afternoon. I 'm going out with my husband."

"The poor mare needs a canter." He was disappointed.

"Take her out yourself."

"Yes, but she don't like me any more."

Rose smiled as she went in. But she was sorry not to go out with the mare. It would be a perfect day. The smile faded. Indeed, she had only then remembered that she had promised to go with Henry to Sheriffville that afternoon to a party to meet some of his friends. She had not wanted particularly to go, but it was obviously a duty; and she had ignored the old man's disgruntled comments at lunch.

"It 's bad enough for Henry to go. Why should you?"

She would have to hurry her dressing. She left the flowers with Lucy to arrange and went to her room. Henry's ordinary clothes were lying over a chair. He must already have dressed. She took from the closet a pink taffeta dress, which she knew was becoming. The hoops swung past her as she lifted it down. Her vexation at losing the ride momentarily left her. It was her favorite dress and till now she had not had an opportunity of wearing it. It was the last dress made for her trousseau. She remembered the little seamstress saying, "I hope he 'll like it, Miss Rose; but I don't suppose you 'll get many chances to wear it up north." Boston seemed very far off now; and the girl before the tall mirror another person from the Rose who tried it on again now.

She took pains with her hair, smoothing it carefully and adjusting the net exactly. Her summer bonnet was trimmed with red to match the tight little flaring jacket with square-scalloped tails. She saw herself in the glass, a pretty picture, and acknowledged the effect with a slight rising of color as she drew on her white gloves. Even Henry acknowledged the effect with a boyish grin as he helped her into the buggy.

She settled her skirts skillfully and they started. The single horse, Ned, a leggy bay with a long trot, went swiftly. He was a well-behaved horse, of whom the old man said that he knew every road and did not need driving. He could be

trusted with Henry. "The boy does n't half drive, thinking about his books and things, and a lively horse would kill him in a mile, even if he did n't smash the buggy."

Henry told her something of the people she would meet: "Mrs. Sheriff was quite particular with me for not bringing you up sooner. She 's a very clever woman and writes better sonnets than most of us. Her daughters, Olivia and Delia, are musical. Mr. Sheriff is very rich — one of the oldest settlers — and their house is supposed to be the finest north of the Mohawk. You 'll get on with him — he likes pretty girls round." He seemed perfectly unconscious of the implied compliment, and when she said "Thank you" with a mischievous sideways glance at him, he answered blankly, "What?" and went on: "They 're one of the best and oldest families in the state. They settled up on the hill because of Mr. Sheriff's health. We don't see much of them in the valley; but of course, there would n't be much to interest people like them down there."

He said it perfectly sincerely. Rose wondered what they would be like. She felt a little nervous, a little frightened, as she had felt on going to her first party. Henry seemed to have perfect confidence. But he was going among friends. He was never worried by people's opinions.

"It was Mr. Treadwell — he gave me a letter to your father when I first went to Cambridge, though of course Father and your father were friends too — who took me up here the first time. He 's not here now. There 's Mr. Meredith and his family. He sent his son to Heidelberg. They 're the most important."

He mentioned other names, but they passed over Rose. They had climbed the hills, leaving the river valley behind. They were crossing the uplands by the same road they had first traveled. Three months ago; it looked almost strange now. She had been down so long.

She remembered how she and Henry had stood on the edge of the valley while the driver adjusted the chain to the coach wheel; and she had been afraid to go down and had taken his arm. She had been afraid of the old man and of them all.

It had looked so distant, so wild. She had been down there three months; it was home now; a place for her all her life, to which she was bound. But the ties were familiar; many of them she had made herself. As they topped the lip of the valley she had seen a ridge northward, with a knuckle of the valley road upon it, the river stretching out beyond — the place where she and Bascom had stopped in their ride.

Henry said suddenly, "I 've written Mr. May about getting a job."

"Yes?"

"Don't you think it would be best to go?"

Rose was silent.

He went on, "You saw how the old man acted when I wanted to go up here this afternoon, and worse when he found you were going too? I can't stand it much more. That 's the way it 's always been, only worse before you came."

He stared down at the reins. His face was troubled.

"Would n't you want to leave, Rose?"

She thought, almost with a jerk, that it would be best. She had been worried since that night in the meadow. Henry was offering an escape. Did he know? She glanced sidewise.

"Of course it won't be definite. We can decide, when we hear, what 's best to do." He had mistaken her silence. "I ought to hear to-day. I want to stop for the mail."

The horse took the buggy steadily up the slopes of Tug Hill. Maples grew in irregular rows along the road; under them a west wind drew briskly, snapping the horse's black mane back at them. Farms grew more closely than in the valley, and on the hill fields above them Rose saw sheep, small flocks, like grey shadows drifting among the darker shadows of the clouds.

They passed through a little cluster of houses, which Henry named, Sheriffville, and went on till they found a wall built of limestone along the road. The horse turned through the gates as if he were familiar with them, and went smartly up a winding drive to a limestone house.

It might have been a house transplanted bodily from Ireland. In fact it was an exact copy of the house outside of Dub-

lin from which the Sheriff stock originated. Its simple lines disguised its capacity for rooms and gave it dignity, and the atmosphere obtained upon its hill overlooking the village was one of complete repose. But Rose did not notice its beauty. A butler in plum livery stood in the door and a uniformed groom was waiting to take the horse. She paused on the stone steps, her heart slightly chilled. Eastward she could see all the way across the flats to the dark line of the valley from which they had driven: the small farms, the small meadows, the unbroken forest on the farther line of hills — violet now in the afternoon. Uniforms here seemed out of place. This house had none of the carved, almost ostentatious, woodwork, like that on the cupola of Ralph's house; but the latter was suitable, an expression of irrepressible strength, ready to waste itself in the very excess of its vigor. This was aloof. It was in better taste, no doubt, but where was the common ground for them to meet? Certainly not this distant countryside.

She entered on Henry's arm. Voices issued from a doorway on the right. A maid took Rose upstairs to deposit her wraps. She returned to the head of the stairs refreshed with a touch of powder, defensive, aware of herself as she looked down at Henry, waiting for her.

They went into the room side by side. Rose had a confused sense of everyone watching her. There were perhaps nine persons in the room. A slim, tall lady in blue silk sat beside a fire screen. She greeted Henry kindly, with an outstretched hand drooping gracefully from the wrist. He introduced Rose.

"My dear," she said, "you should have made your boy bring you before. We 've been anxious to see you."

Her brow was smooth, bland; the eyes, untroubled, surveyed Rose with a cool, intelligent appraisal. Such a woman could be brutal, but she chose to be gracious.

She introduced Rose to her guests in a group. "You 'll know them individually soon enough, my dear. Now sit down by me, have some Madeira, and tell me how you like the country."

She handled the glass gracefully.

Rose said, "I think it 's beautiful country."

"We 've a fine view," said Mrs. Sheriff. She settled back in her chair, turned slightly sideways toward Rose, a touch of complacence in the attitude. "You know I like being high up like this. It gives one a safe feeling, as if no one could look down on you."

Rose said, "I suppose that is true."

"Henry does not seem very fond of the valley. He comes up here often. We are glad to have him. He 's a dear boy."

"He seems contented," Rose said. She felt the woman's cold glance.

"Marriage makes a difference," said Mrs. Sheriff, with a pleasant drawl.

Rose glanced at Mr. Sheriff, a finely built man, with a self-indulgent mouth. He looked very elegant, leaning against the mantel and chatting merrily with one of the Meredith girls, and, like his wife, complacent.

The taste of the furniture was faultless; the guests talked with the soft modulation of good breeding. The atmosphere was on a rich scale, and it seemed easy to see why Henry was enamored of these people. By contrast old Ralph Wilder with his gaudy waistcoats and harsh bullying voice was common stuff. This was the distillation of fine generations handed down. Rose wondered why it should leave her mentally antagonistic.

"Are you musical, my dear?" Mrs. Sheriff asked.

Rose had a voice of considerable sweetness, but it was untrained. She considered it wiser to admit nothing. "I 'm afraid not."

A young man had entered. "That 's Jack," Mrs. Sheriff said. "Is n't he handsome? Both my girls are wild about him." Rose saw a rather dandified young man, about twenty-five, with a dark complexion. The two Sheriff girls had greeted him effusively, and he smiled at them with a slightly supercilious air, evidently calculated to give an impression of experienced cynicism. He returned Henry's warm greeting offhandedly, and came over to his hostess. She introduced Rose casually by her first name, saying, "Let 's not be formal," and

his eye took her in in one comprehensive glance. Instantly, with a manifestly charming air, he appropriated her.

"Where have you been hiding such a flower?" he asked Mrs. Sheriff.

"You 'll have to discover that yourself, Jack. Come now. We 'll adjourn to the music room for half an hour. We must n't take too long from our literary meeting. Henry has some verses, and your sister Grace, and Mr. Abbot has a historical paper."

She led the way for her guests. Rose found herself alone with young Meredith.

"Let 's not listen to that rubbish," he said, opening a door to the terrace. "Would n't you like a walk in the garden? It 's really worth seeing."

Rose glanced round for Henry, but he had gone with the others. She did not know quite what to say. He was distasteful to her with his open admiration. Then she reflected that it was no more open than Bascom's and that Henry admired Mr. Meredith extremely. She could not be rude to one of his friends.

"Yes, let 's."

"They 'll never miss us. And I can't stand that fellow Wilder's rubbish. What they get him up here for is beyond my comprehension. Are you staying in the house?"

"No," she said, "I 'm down in the valley."

"Oh," he took it for granted, "a friend of the Abbots. Nice people, not very well off. I hear old Wilder is building a barn that 's to be the biggest in the state. Just like him. He never made a go with us, so he built a bigger house than any of us. Thought that would make an impression, I suppose. That did n't work, so he 's trying a barn."

Rose said, "Perhaps."

He did not notice her coldness.

"Poor misguided people. When Lafayette came through here we took him to see the 'French' house — not a call, just drove past. You should have heard him laugh. Poor Wilder. I don't doubt he hoped we 'd drop in."

"Yes," said Rose, nettled. The boy was insufferable. "He

was probably disappointed. Especially after having had Joseph Bonaparte visiting him."

He glanced at her sharply.

"Oh, I say! Where do you come from?"

"Wilder farm, Mr. Meredith."

"I beg your pardon. A thousand times. I thought I 'd heard you were a Boston girl."

"I am."

"It 's stupid. We all mistake things sometimes."

"I think so too," said Rose drily.

"Let 's look at the hollyhock walk."

He offered his arm. They were playing out a frigid game now for their own satisfaction. The hollyhocks marched no more stiffly. He showed her the garden thoroughly but tersely, giving side glances at the high color in her cheeks. His error did not daunt him, his admiration was more outspoken in his eyes than ever. Whatever they came from, these Wilders, they had good-looking women.

He put the thought into graceful words. But Rose said coldly, "The garden 's lovely. Had n't we better join the others?"

It had taken more time than she had expected. He managed skillfully to mix into the others as they gathered in the hall. Rose ran up for her wraps. Mrs. Sheriff helped her with them. "Was n't Henry's poem nice? Some really sweet lines. He has a sensitive ear."

Luckily Rose had read the verses before they came — a poem about Bonaparte coming to his Diana park, the fallen monarch finding a haven in the wilds. It was pretty. She had liked it. She could say, "Yes."

Henry was flushed and happy. Rose saw that as they drove downward. He ran over with admiration for these people, and she read a pathetic sort of gratitude into his words. Poor boy, in his anxiety for escape he was blind. They all made fun of him behind his back — all the younger ones, anyway. The elders tolerated him because of his genuine taste. They would not have a good thing out of their grasp. He was a possession to be produced tactfully on occasions.

"Is n't Jack Meredith a splendid fellow?"

"Splendid!" said Rose.

He glanced at her.

"You don't think so?"

"No!" Rose cried.

"Why, why not?"

"He 's a boor."

"Boor! You 're crazy, Rose."

His cheeks were flushed, his small mouth thin, and all the stubbornness he had inherited from his father showed in his chin without the strength.

Rose was gazing ahead. The ground kept falling away before Ned's hoofs in long slopes, each succeeded by another as long. In the distance she could see the dark line of the valley's edge. Along their path the trees cast long shadows.

"They 're fine people! You could n't help seeing that, Rose. Why, you must be crazy."

"Yes, they 're fine people."

He accepted that; she let it drop. The disillusionment would not be worth the pain to him. The moment's homesickness their gentility had given her vanished. She was glad of the descent to the valley. The old man might be rough-hewn, but they were forthright strokes. She preferred his domineering to the elegant freedom on the hill. He had not let their neglect worry him, but had gone about his life. She had heard they came to him when they needed influence in the legislature.

The horse stopped to settle himself for the long hill. Henry said, "Giddap," impatiently, shaking the reins, but he took his time. Below was the valley in plain view, where they lived, the old man, Joan, and Bascom. The evening shadow had almost crossed it, but on the far edge of the meadow the sun still pricked out the rising timbers of the barn.

"It would be good to live with people like that, Rose! I wonder if there's any mail."

Rose said, mollifyingly, "They have beautiful flowers."

But she was glad to be in sight of home.

VII

THE EXECUTION OF A DOG

1

NEITHER Rose nor Henry spoke on the long descent into the village. To go down and down into the valley, with the unexpected coolness of the evening shadow thick about their faces, was enough to hold them silent even if their moods had not precluded speech.

Rose felt tired. She had not realized till now how closely she had been upon her guard among those new people. The necessity for a strict defense had been apparent from the very first; now that she was free of them, she felt her heart blossoming out for the comfort of the homely surroundings to which she had become accustomed. A sidewise glance at Henry showed his thin face absorbed: he might be tasting again the polite applause or he might be conning new verses to himself; he was as much out of his own life as he had always been on returning from these literary afternoons. In such gatherings mediocre capacities find a marvelous and unfortunate stimulus. Though no genius, Henry had more than average ability, and he was able to detect the genuine note of appreciation. It satisfied him; there was nothing better. Public recognition, which would very likely have reconciled Ralph to literary pursuits, had no appeal. Rose was glad of his contentment. A time must come when he would wake up to their personal opinion. Perhaps he then would be old enough not to care. For to-day, politely modified applause was sufficient.

The horse, Ned, switched his tail at the foot of the hill and trotted smartly to the post office. From habit he stopped, wheeling the buggy neatly against the side of the porch.

Henry started. Rose appreciated the old man's reason for not allowing him to drive a younger horse.

"I 'll run in for the mail. I doubt if anyone has been sent over for it."

He handed the reins to her, though there was no possibility of the horse's starting until he had come out again. Rose sat alone in the buggy. Through the open door of the store she had a glimpse of Henry watching Mr. Mercer, who sorted letters for him, and of the old men round the stove. In the dimness she could see Uncle George's patriarchal beard and his ancient hand outstretched in punctuation of some large opinion.

There was no life in the street except for a dog who sniffed at himself in the middle of the board walk; and a cat, lying on a branch of the maple tree over him, looked down unsympathetically. Rose had an impulse to take the poor animal home for a bath, but suddenly he shook himself, cast the cat a cold look, and came trotting by, tongue slightly lolling, for all the world like a gentleman of leisure returning to his fireside after a day's good sport. The cat watched him, yawned, and licked her paws. Rose smiled.

Henry emerged from the store, handed her a thin sheaf of letters and a newspaper, got in, took the reins and said, "Giddap, Ned"; but the horse had already started and was making good time home, ears pricked, and eager for the barn.

Rose watched the little houses they went past; mostly clapboarded now and painted strange pinks and blues and greens — colors mixed at home with no painter's knowledge of pigment. But even with their occasional weirdness they had a pathetic kind of appeal, as if each marked an individual discovery in the search for beauty.

A single white house at the end of the street belonged to the Merrils, and the little Forest Church made a strong contrast in its coat of half-logs, a reminder of the old wilderness days.

When the bridge planks had ceased rumbling beneath the wheels, Rose glanced at the letters.

"Two for you, Henry."

He glanced over her shoulder.

"One from Mr. May. Good. I'll read it as soon as I get home. It may mean a place for us, Rose."

She was examining the other letters. "Here 's one for your father."

The last letter was for Bascom. It looked small and out of place, a folded square of brown paper sealed with candle wax, the address written laboriously with some of the letters printed, the thick ink blotted, as if the pen had been cut by an unpractised hand.

"What a quaint letter!" Rose exclaimed. "I wonder who it 's from."

Henry glanced again. It carried a Leyden postmark.

"Lord knows. One of his friends, no doubt."

"Friends?"

"Yes. He 's always running around to the natives."

Rose's sense of comfort, which had come with her down the hills, was replaced by curiosity. As she studied the letters, her instinct showed her the effort that had gone into their crude fashioning. They bore to her the marks of physical effort that was close kin to anguish. Passion, or dread, or death might have produced them. Was it a man or a woman? Suddenly she remembered the night in the barn and Dan asking, "Is that you, Pearl?" She would like to know who the girl was and if it could be she who had written the letter.

As she mused, her eyes mechanically following the tall trunks of the pines backward, she kept turning the letter over and over in her hand, and after a minute her glove caught on a corner of the candle-wax seal. It was too fat to cleave tight to the paper, and at the touch it came away with the flap. Quite unconsciously she had opened it. She glanced at Henry; but as he had not noticed, she furtively tried to press it back into place. But there was not warmth enough in her fingers to make it hold. She slipped it back under the other letters as they turned between the gateposts.

The horse almost trotted through the *porte-cochère* to get to the barn. Henry had to stop him. He looked back with an impatient stare while Rose got out. Then he went on, and Rose entered the house alone. The hall was empty, the can-

dles not yet lit over the fireplace. She sorted the letters into piles, leaving them addresses up, so that there would be no chance of anyone's finding the open letter. Feeling ridiculously guilty, she called Lucy and stood guard while the woman lit the candles.

Then she went to her room to take off her jacket and bonnet.

The house was quiet. With the window of the bedroom closed, Rose could hear none of the kitchen activity that should be audible at this hour. She lit a candle and took off her bonnet in the dim light before the mirror. In the hall, she suddenly heard Henry come in, then his footsteps mounting the stairs. He had taken his mail up to his study. She wondered where Bascom was. She felt an unreasonable impatience with him for not coming and getting his letter. She smoothed the hair back from her forehead and held the candle up to her face. Her eyes met openly the eyes in the glass. "Why should I care?" she asked herself. Almost with fierceness she put down the candle and took off her jacket. The mirror had satisfied her, and she was ashamed.

She blew out the flame and stood with her hand at the door. If she went out, she felt that the temptation to glance at the letter would overcome her resolution. It had been an impulse in the woods, she said to herself; it was all over. It had to be over. But none the less she hesitated.

Then she heard a thin voice crying. There was an unnatural urgency in it which made it difficult to recognize. It came from behind the house. Suddenly she caught a deeper note, more masculine, and she knew it was Joan. "Father! Father!" Joan was crying. "Father!"

Rose threw the door open and rushed out. Overhead she heard Henry's study window open. From the old man's office came the sound of a chair scraping and his heavy boots tramping to the door. Parchal opened the kitchen door and looked at Rose with his stale eyes. Over his head she saw Mrs. Smith setting down the kettle. Joan came running in just as the old man stepped out.

Her homely face was working with excitement and fear.

"What is it?" Rose asked.

"Father!"

The girl was out of breath. Ralph stepped forward. His face was tender as he put a huge arm over her broad shoulders. "Now, Joan, what 's the matter?"

The girl caught her breath.

"There 's a big dog in the deer park. He 's killed the twin fawns and is running after Gregory."

The change in the old man's face was complete. His mouth hardened and his eyes blazed. "What kind of dog?"

"A black hound, a big one."

"That 's Lecky's. I told him to shoot the brute when he got in before."

The words came over his shoulder. He was running for his gun. He returned hatless, red-faced. There were little white dents beside his nostrils. He went out through the door and began marching down the path toward the deer park. Joan started after him and, as if she were in the sweep of something awful, Rose followed. The old man never noticed her. Behind them Parchal slammed the door, staying inside.

The sun had set and the pines cast a darkness upon the bridge over the glen. But long before they reached it the old man and the two girls heard the hoarse broken barking of a dog. Shot through it were harsh flat blasting whistles. There was an utter savagery in the two sounds, but it was no more savage than Ralph's voice.

"By God, he 's cornered him!"

He opened the gate, turned deliberately, hooked it behind him. Rose followed Joan on to the bridge.

From the bench they looked down into the glen. For a moment their eyes were unable to pierce the heavy shadows; then they saw Ralph's white head coming out from between two small hemlocks. He went straight toward the sound of the dog's barking, without hesitation, without apparent hurry; but his big legs took him swiftly.

Rose saw them, a high-pitched bark carrying her eyes to the spot. There was an instant's silence; then she heard a thick mumbling sound and the buck's whistle; a half-yelp, half-snarl from the dog.

"He got Greg by the shoulder," Joan cried. She seized Rose's arm, her big fingers closing spasmodically. "Did you see Greg shake him off?"

Now that their eyes were accustomed to the dim light, Rose saw the two — the old buck, backed up against two rocks, his fine head lowered, and the big black shape of the dog half crouched before him. Suddenly the buck lunged, striking with his pointed hoofs, but the dog leaped back, and in again as the buck went back in his turn, so fast that they escaped the eye. Then they assumed their first position. The dog was slobbering a pink foam that looked brown in the shadow; his eyes nearly closed, his tongue far out and tossing when he barked. The old grey buck stood braced before him, head nicely poised, but his flanks heaved. Against the dark background of rocks his eyes shone with a feral green light. They were as still as statues. And to the dog's left the old man stood white-haired, rifle aimed, struck for the instant in stone.

The gun blazed; the report struck the ear a flat blow. And for a breathing space, while the powder smoke drifted along the brook, the three did not move. Then both dog and buck leaped at each other. The dog collapsed in the air, falling head down on his shoulder, crumpling. The buck seemed to halt in mid-leap; he came down on the kicking black body. He reared again and came down again with feet like javelins. And again he went up and again struck, as if he could not stop. The dog never whimpered. Rose turned away, feeling sick. She heard the old man saying, "Good lad, Greg! Good lad! Savage him, Greg! Good lad!"

With a sort of bravado he leaned on his gun, as if he chose deliberately not to reload. Rose said to Joan, "Come home now, dear." And Joan followed her meekly. Both of them had wet cheeks. Joan was saying, "Good old Greg!" Rose wept without knowing why. She felt weak. She had never seen a man look like old Ralph. . . .

He did not notice their going, but he waited till the buck had finished, sniffed once at the mangled body, gone over to the two dead fawns, and then slipped noiselessly out of sight among the hemlock growth to nurse his torn shoulder. He

gave the old man a long stare before he went, but he had no fight now.

Ralph picked up the body of the dog. It was almost severed through the loins and, being taken by the tail, seemed about to break. He dropped it and took it by the scruff of the neck instead. It weighed heavily on his fingers and shoulder, but he dragged it up and back to the house, leaving it in its fresh blood by the verandah steps.

Rose heard him enter his study and put the gun up on its pegs, go to his room to wash. Parchal came out and touched a gong for dinner. Henry came down the stairs, a little white, and said to her, "Has n't he had fun?"

The old man coming out of his room overheard and thundered down to him, "Yes, he has! You did n't see those two fawns. Even if you did you 'd probably stand by and watch murder going on."

"You can't blame the dog," said Henry. "It 's his instinct."

"I did n't say it was n't. I did n't blame him. I shot the brute. Greg did the blaming. Go out and look at him, he' s by the steps."

He came down, his red face frozen, looked Henry hard in the eye, and led the way with stamps of his heavy boots to the dining room.

"Parchal."

The man appeared with soup plates, ducked back, and reappeared without them.

"Where 's Bascom?"

"Not down."

"Beat the damned gong so he can hear."

Parchal obeyed. The old man sat waiting in silence.

Bascom appeared, in front of Parchal, ready for dinner.

"Bascom, ride down to Lecky's. Tell him I have his dog and he 's to call for it to-morrow. Parchal will hold you some supper."

Bascom nodded.

The others ate the entire meal without a word spoken. From time to time Ralph cast an angry look at his son, but his glance carried on to Rose. The girl was white. She had n't looked up

from her plate since Bascom had gone out. Well, he admitted to himself, it must have been a bit bloody for her city ideas. He should not have let them come. He would not have if he 'd only noticed. Henry had no business talking like that. . . .

He went to his study after the meal. Joan went off to bed. Henry, in the hall, burst out to Rose, "Did you ever see such a beast?"

"Henry! He's your father!"

"That does n't make any difference."

"He only shot the dog. Greg did the rest."

"I 'll bet he stood there cheering him on."

Rose shuddered.

"That 's how he got all this." Henry waved his hand. "That 's how he holds us."

"Don't think of it. After all, the dog was mad."

"Oh, all right; if you like such things, I won't say anything." He was white and trembling. He turned upstairs.

"Henry!" Rose too was pale. "Henry. Say good-night. Don't go like that."

He looked at her from the top of the stairs.

"Mr. May says there 's a place open, which he 'll try to get for me, if I want. I 'll write him to-night." His voice shook. Then he turned swiftly above the landing.

Rose sat by herself. The fire kept flickering beside her, and she chose to remain there rather than go to the sitting room. They were all upset, she said to herself. Henry must have thought she favored the old man's conduct. Then she was angry with him. The whole thing was a nightmare. Even poor Bascom had had to ride out without his supper. She got up suddenly and went to the kitchen to make sure the chops were kept hot. Reassured, she returned to the hall. Her eye fell on Bascom's letter. He had not noticed it. There was no sound. She went over to the table and took it up. She heard a step in the hall, and, glancing round, saw Mrs. Brinley with her eyes on the letter.

The former housekeeper was carrying a candle and a pitcher of hot water.

"Good night," she said. "Are you waiting for Bascom?"

Rose felt that the woman had read her intention. What other reason could she have for asking that question? She felt her color rising, but she said coolly, "Are you quite comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Good night."

Rose did not change her attitude till the door of an upstairs room closed. Then with defiant openness she read the letter. The writing duplicated the address.

DER BASCOM

Driscoll is away and Ive been hoping you would come and see me I have been waiting to see you I have got to tell you somthing very much I think you ought to no it please come soon. Hoping you are wel I remain

Yours truly

PEARL

Rose was suddenly conscious of biting her lip. A wave of anger passed through her.

So it was Bascom the girl might have been coming to see! Up till that instant, Rose, in the newness of her experience, had taken for granted Bascom's feeling for her. It had been new and delicious for both, she had thought, a happening for two people who were really strangers, unpremeditated but complete. She stood with the letter shaking in her hand. The fire sparked; she started, turned calmer.

What kind of woman was this Pearl — Driscoll, maybe? She remembered the man on the load of stone and Bascom working with him. Rose put the letter down as she had previously left it and went to the hall mirror.

Her eyes had shadows and her face was pale. As she looked, the color mounted again. No one would have guessed her a wife to see her there, blushing at her own reflection. Nor would they have guessed that she was jealous.

She did not admit it to herself, if indeed she was conscious of jealousy. Nor did it occur to her to question her feeling of proprietorship over Bascom. He had filled in her life a place,

she vaguely realized, that Henry could never fill; his presence came over her as sunlight came over the grass of the great meadow or the smell of balsams came on a south wind.

She returned to her chair by the fire. After all, she thought, the letter might mean nothing. But it had made her aware of herself. She got up and blew out the candles. In the dark, the bricks cutting the firelight off just beyond her toes, she was almost hidden.

She heard a horse canter up the drive. Presently Bascom entered. He muttered an oath at the darkness, felt his way to the table to put down his hat, touched the letter. He brought it to the fire to read, squatting down within three feet of Rose. He read it slowly while she watched his face. It held no readable expression, but he tore the letter in two and tossed it on the logs. The ink showed through as the paper curled, then it burned in a little burst of flame. "Oh, damn," he said softly. To Rose it was at once an admission of relations with the girl and an intimation of her own power over him.

He got up and saw her.

"Asleep?"

"Dozing. I did not hear you come in." She rose also. "Come, I 'll get your supper."

She got it without disturbing the cook and set it out on the table. They sat down facing each other, one candle between them. He laughed.

"That dog certainly turned this place upside down!"

She remembered the sudden march to war. It seemed almost funny now. She caught his mirth, tilted her head, and laughed. The candlelight shone on her even teeth.

The old man came in. He stood looking down on them.

"By God, you 're a pair to look at."

His good humor was roused, as always, by any handsome sight. He would look so at a well-matched pair of horses. But his son and daughter-in-law he could take into his confidence.

His face sobered and he said with a comical anxiety to propitiate Rose, "I 'm sorry I got angry with Henry. He annoys me sometimes. You know I have a bad temper."

He seemed to be aware of the figure he made and joined in her laughter. Rose was happy. "I 'll get you some milk."

"I 'd like it," he said. She brought glasses for them both and they drank milk while Bascom ate his supper.

When the old man went off to bed, Bascom said, "He 'll blow up again when Lecky gets here. I did n't tell Lecky what had happened, but he 's guessed and he 's mad as a hornet."

Rose asked, "Who is he?"

"Oh, he 's a poacher. Hangs out with a bunch of his brats up Leyden way. He 's a sort of cousin of Driscoll and works for him once in a while."

He folded his napkin.

"I 've got a lot to do to-morrow. I 'll have to go to bed early. Thanks for getting me supper. It was a nice party."

He kissed her lightly. Rose was careful. They parted in the hall. . . .

She went to bed slowly. She wished she knew more of the girl that had written the letter. There was something pathetic in it, but something in Rose held her on guard. Lying beside Henry's empty space, she was aware of having been stirred loose from herself. She no longer feared Bascom. She could see him again squatting before the fire. Had he looked sad, angry, tender, or afraid? She could not tell. She was afraid of herself.

But when Henry came to bed at last she refused to acknowledge his kiss, allowing him to think that she slept.

2

Rose woke at sunrise with an unaccountable feeling of depression. She got up at once, hoping to shake it off, and washed in cold water. Behind her Henry breathed evenly. She stood at the window as she brushed her hair.

A horse was coming along the drive. She parted the curtains carefully and saw Bascom on the grey mare, the bitch trotting ahead. The two animals went stealthily, scarcely making a sound, but Bascom rode with bent head, hands in his pockets, letting the reins lie loose from the mare's withers.

He went by without glancing at the house, and Rose waited until she had heard him come in and go upstairs.

From the lawn, where she walked up and down, leaving dark trails in the dew, she could hear the house waking. Pete and Leo came by to their work on the barn, and some other men followed them in rigs, to help with the building during the brief interim between the hay and grain.

At seven smoke climbed suddenly from the kitchen chimney, a blue breath against the dark pine boughs.

She had come out to find quiet, but her thoughts were turbulent. The letter, the scene in the deer park, Bascom reading the letter by the fire, the night supper of the three of them — the two Wilders, she, herself, that had been Rose Lane, sitting between father and son, both big handsome men with a power for brutality. She had seen it that afternoon in Ralph, she was aware of its presence in Bascom.

Henry did not belong with them; by right neither should she. But she knew that she was at home here. She wondered if Henry would get a place in Syracuse. She must go then. She ought to go for her own sake, yet the thought chilled her. She loved the country as the old man loved it, but less possessively. Yet, when she had heard the mad barking of the dog the day before, her possessive instinct had been roused, and in spite of herself she had gone forth to see justice administered as eagerly as Ralph had gone to administer it.

The old man's quaint effort at propitiation at the supper table. . . . Both he and Bascom had a tender streak; she had seen them with Joan time and again, whom Henry had no sympathy for. Their loves and hatreds were instinctive, overmastering. In the old man they were enduring. In that mood he was building his barn.

Her walking had taken her out of the grove. Across the meadows she saw the barn. Its shape was now apparent. The uprights rose from all four corners. The clean new wood walls glanced in the sun, and the men, like ants, were fitting in the braces.

Here was the old man's work. The instinct for handing down to his sons something finer than he himself had had was taking

form before her eyes. She thought of the proverb, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. . . ."

She stood looking across the meadows with the peculiar insight of an early waker, and it seemed to her that something in the barn was wrong.

As she stood there, she felt the dew soaking through her shoes. The chill mounted her legs and she felt it pleasantly on her back. She drew a deep breath. It might have been she who built the barn, there was such vitality in her poised figure.

A hand fell on her shoulder. Without looking, she knew it for Ralph's. They stood side by side.

"Rose," he said, after a minute, "when you have a child, remember I want it to be a boy."

He was smiling. It was a pleasantry.

Rose felt it seriously. "I hope it will be."

Behind them, from the house, they heard the gong ring for breakfast. . . .

They walked back together. He wanted a grandson. Children. Rose had not thought of them. She had taken them for granted, something that came with marriage, like one's house, trousseau. She wished she might give him one.

They paused at the verandah steps and at the same instant their eyes fell on the dead dog. He lay huddled up as Ralph had dropped him, his lips drawn tight away from his teeth between which the blood and foam had hardened. Rose mounted hurriedly. Ralph followed slowly.

"I 'd forgotten him," he said. "It 's too bad. That was a handsome hound."

Bascom met them in the hall.

"I just saw Lecky coming down the road."

The old man's face darkened.

"Tell them to wait breakfast," he said. "Keep Joan inside. You too, Rose."

He went out on the porch and stood waiting. The rig was audible now on the gravel. Rose found Joan in the parlor. "We 'll stay here till they come in," she said. Through the window she had a glimpse of a thin man in dirty clothes. His face was grey, his eyes strained and bright, his mouth a single pale

line. He came up the steps, a stooped figure, quickly and lightly. He looked quick and strong.

Rose saw Ralph standing with his hands at his sides, looking the man in the eye.

"Good morning, Lecky."

"Bascom said you had my dog." His voice was pitched in a high note that made it hard to hear.

"Yes."

"Bascom said I could git him this morning."

"Yes."

"Was he running?"

"Yes."

"What was your business stopping him, Wilder?"

"He was on my place."

"A dog can run where a deer takes him."

"Not on my place."

"He 's a kind dog."

"I don't doubt it."

"Why did n't you let him be?"

"He was in my deer park, Lecky. He 'd gone mad and killed the two fawns and was after the old buck. I told you before to get rid of him or tie him up."

The man's eyes fell and he said surlily, "Well, why did n't you hide him proper and send him home?"

"I don't lick another man's dog."

"Where is he?"

"Beside the steps."

The man went over and looked down. "My God!" His face turned red. "You dirty brute, Wilder!"

He walked close up to Ralph. They stood together breathing in each other's faces. The old man's cheeks were crimson and his chest rose and fell as if blows were being struck against it from within.

"Wilder, I can't have any law on you. But I won't forget about this dog. And I 'm going to tell you just what I think about you. I 've been wanting to, you — "

"Shut up! Take your dog and get out."

"About you and the whole bunch of you. You fat off us.

You think you can do as God Almighty wants to. Your dirty puppy" — he let his eyes take in Bascom — "thinks he can rut around. . . ."

"Shut up!"

"You — "

Ralph's hand shot out and caught the man's collar before he was properly on guard. In a moment the huge forearm had sent him twisting round. He threw his weight backward and clutched at the hand. But Ralph braced his big legs and held him. The knuckles of his big hand whitened and the arm held the man up as if it were a bar of iron. Only his chest rose and fell.

"Bascom, get my whip."

Bascom, grinning, went into the office and came out with the old man's favorite driving whip, a smooth tan-bound whalebone. Ralph took it in his left hand.

"I 'm going to leather you. I 'm an old man, but I can handle a mush eater like you. I don't blame your dog. I shot him. But I blame you and I 'll give you the hiding instead of the dog."

He raised the whip and brought it across the man's legs. As it cut down, it made a shrill whistle that reached to the parlor.

The man said nothing. His face was dark red and his eyes stared straight up into the sun-drenched sky. His hands still fought with the hand in his collar. He began kicking. But the whip whistled and came down, whistled and came down. The sound of it brought to Rose another glimpse of the old buck stamping the dog, again and again. It went on till the man suddenly relaxed. He had made no sound, he did not now.

Ralph let the whip tip lie on the porch floor and looked at his job. He was soaking with sweat, his face shining. But his mouth and eyes were hard and calm. It was merely punishment.

He was satisfied with his work. He straightened the man up and kicked him down the steps. The man fell with his face in the gravel, almost as the hound's had fallen. He did not move for a minute. Then his hands went out and caught the

spokes of the wheel. The horse, who had stood nervously, shied.

Ralph said, "Whoa!"

The man climbed to his feet. His face was streaked with black where the dust had stuck to tears. He swallowed convulsively, turned to the porch. "By God, Wilder!" It was all he managed to say. But his eyes were unforgettable.

Bascom grinned thinly. "He 's a pretty tough rooster for an old man, Lecky. I told you he was the last time the dog showed up."

"Shut up, Bascom."

Ralph looked back to Lecky coldly. "Don't forget to take your dog."

Without a word the man stooped, took up the broken black body in his arms, put it in the wagon box, and climbed up to the seat. The horse started as he picked up the reins. He did not look at them. But he backed the horse carefully in turning and went out round the corner of the house at a walk. The sun shone on the rig and the poor dead dog. Henry burst into the parlor.

"I can't stand it!"

Bascom came in.

"The man 's bad all through. Good thing for him. He 's a wife-beater and a poacher."

"I can't stand it."

Henry ran out after the wagon. They saw him catch the rein and stop the horse. He came to the wheel and held out his hand. He said something they could not hear, but his attitude was obviously that of a man ashamed of his own blood. Lecky listened, his eyes on the horse's rump. When Henry finished he turned and deliberately spat on the outstretched hand and resumed his slow progress.

Henry started back. He could see them watching from the window. He passed by them without speaking and went to his study.

The old man came in. "Breakfast. Too bad to be so late." He led the way. He was still breathing deeply.

Bascom said, "He let him off easy. It 's too bad you

could n't have seen him handle that man." He looked proudly at his father.

Ralph said, "Don't you ever crow over a man like that, Bascom, when you 've seen he has enough."

Bascom acknowledged his error.

Rose said nothing. Henry had seen only the broken body of the dog. He had not seen the two fawns and the black beast in the glen. And the old man loved his possessions.

3

The heat of a long day had entered the house. In the kitchen the fire had been allowed to die. Mrs. Smith, in a bright blue dress, was rocking back and forth before the open window. Her face and arms, bare to the elbows, were bright red. From time to time she patted her face with a corner of her apron. She seemed intent on some knitting, but her mind was intent on possible conversation.

Through the pantry door she could see her husband polishing the flat silver, his lips pursed solemnly, his hands working with inconceivable slowness.

"You 'd better get a hurry up, Parchal," she said. "You won't have that done by supper time."

He gave her a lustreless stare. "I 'm getting along all right, I guess. If I want help I 'll let you know."

Mrs. Smith rocked jerkily. In a moment she was laughing. "Surely, Parchal." Her eye had caught sight of Lucy coming down the hall.

"Lucy, when it 's hot, you 'll believe me, never go to telling a man how to do a thing. His tongue gets greased with sweat and gets away from him then."

Lucy tossed her head.

"I won't need advice on that," she said with a glance at the butler.

Parchal raised his glance sourly. "Meaning me?"

"Keep shut, Parchal," said Mrs. Smith. She turned indignantly on the maid. "If you talk like that you won't need no advice for a fact, girl!"

"Well, Mrs. Smith. Then I won't and I 'm glad of it, too. But I would n't let any man back talk to me, not if I was married." She sat down opposite the cook and folded her hands as if she felt she had scored a point.

"Uh," said Mrs. Smith. "Did you iron the table linen?"

Lucy drew in her breath.

"I thought not," Mrs. Smith nodded grimly. "Well, you can start a fire in the laundry. I won't have any smart young slut heating up my kitchen to-day." She looked round her comfortably. It was shadowy in the kitchen and the stove stood silent and cool, a monster in abeyance. Over it the brass kettles gleamed duskily. There was a pleasant smell of cold ham. Lucy looked regretfully about her, and enviously back to Mrs. Smith, who was now fanning herself with the toe of the sock.

The cook laughed again good-naturedly.

"Now, never you mind. I done up some doilies this noon. There's only a cold supper to-night, thank gracious! And if you 'll mix up some shrub for George when he comes in, it 's all you 'll have to do." She caught the girl's grateful glance. "I feel just about the same way about Parchal myself sometimes. But he 's all right most of the time."

She lifted her skirt off her knees and let it fall back into place with a ballooning motion over the cool air.

"Mrs. Henry come in after dinner and said to have a cold supper to-night. You know she 's real thoughtful, I think."

"Yes," said Lucy. "She is, too." Lucy liked anyone now that she did not have any ironing after all.

"Parchal was saying," Mrs. Smith went on, "that Mrs. Henry and Bascom has been coolish-like lately."

"That 's right," Lucy said affably. "She seemed so the other morning in the hall."

"How was that?"

"Why, Mrs. Henry was carrying out the soiled linen and Bascom come along and made out to help her. I was dusting Ralph's room and I seen it plain. She just said no, it was n't heavy, and put it on her other side, and he went right by.

Then she called me to help her after he 'd gone on downstairs."

Mrs. Smith nodded.

"Bascom 's a pushing kind of a man. But she 's a match for anyone. George thinks he 's hard put on her."

Parchal raised his stale eyes. "That 's right. He asked me once whether she had pretty legs."

"Parchal!"

"Well, he did."

"Well, that ain't a way to talk if he did."

Parchal dropped the knives back into the drawer. "I wonder if she has."

"You shut up!" Mrs. Smith returned her attention to Lucy. "Ain't that just the way a man would talk?"

Lucy kept becoming silence.

"How long has she been acting like this to Bascom?"

"Since that man Lecky come for his dog."

"Well, Ralph did a proper thing to him all right."

"I seen it all," said Parchal. "Slam-bang, and the man jumped. It was a proper whipping."

"Nobody asked you."

Lucy was cracking a piece of ice. Now she went out to the spring house. "My," said Mrs. Smith, when she returned. "I 'm warm. Does it need any sugar? Bring it here, Lucy."

She had a taste. "A little more." She had another taste. "George likes it sweet. Now put it under the table where I can't get to see it."

Lucy brought some crocheting and the two women worked quietly till George put in an appearance.

They made a place for him at the table.

"You look hot, George," said Mrs. Smith.

"I am." He grinned over his crooked shoulder. "Been polishing saddles. Mrs. Henry ain't been riding lately. Her and Bascom don't seem going together the way they was."

"It 's hot," the cook observed judiciously.

He nodded.

"I took a measure down to the barn for Ralph. Him and

Pete are figuring the shingles. It 's commencing to shape up actual." He wiped his mouth. "Mrs. Henry just went on down into the night pasture, walking."

"Yeanh."

"Bascom seen her. 'She 's a picter, George,' he says to me. I guess he 's been wanting to ride again. He went out afterwards."

The conversation drifted lazily. It would soon be time for blackberries. There was no chance of rain. Parchal wished he had a melon. He had had one once in Utica. . . .

Rose walked by herself along a small brook where the cows had made a path. She was wearing a thin veil over her bonnet to keep off sunburn; but here she found it cool, and after a little way she pushed the bonnet back on to her shoulders and sat down under a tamarack.

Her eyes were attracted by some ants who were adding a story to their house. They worked in an orderly fashion, a line coming up on one side with grains of sand, the empty-handed going down the other. On top, other workers built from little piles, and here and there a single ant walked back and forth like a foreman.

The cool soaking into her back awoke her to the pounding of her heart. It must have been the sun. But while she watched the neat manœuvres of the ants, she knew it could not be the sun.

That morning she had met Bascom in the hall, refusing to acknowledge his greeting. And immediately she had been upset. Since she had witnessed the chastisement of Lecky she had been afraid; for the first time then, she had fully appreciated the animal brutality of the Wilders. At the moment it had thrilled her. Now she realized that she was getting beyond her depth. Bascom was offering her a stimulant to a part of her being that she had never suspected.

Brooding on that scene, she had begun to see him in a new light. There was the letter, too. It showed a part of the same streak.

She dipped some water up in her hand and moistened her

lips. It was cool and sweet; it ran gently over moss beyond the light of day.

She had come out alone to think. She watched the ants. Their actions were so definite. There was no one to whom she could turn for guidance.

In the stillness her ears caught the sound of footsteps. She glanced up. Her cheeks grew pale, her eyes dark.

"Bascom." Her color returned with a rush.

He was standing a little way away on the other side of the brook. His face glistened and there were little drops of sweat on his arms.

"Rose."

She looked at him silently.

"What 's been the matter, Rose? You 've hardly said 'Yes' to me for days."

She took up a blade of grass.

"I don't know, Bascom. I did n't know I 'd been acting like that."

The color in his cheeks deepened.

"You know it perfectly well, Rose. What 's the matter?"

She did not answer.

"You can't go on like that. It must be plain to anyone."

"I don't know what you 're talking about," she said desperately.

"Are you afraid of me?"

She laughed.

"Then why are you angry?"

He looked at her steadily.

Her breast rose and fell deeply. She felt her voice thrusting for utterance.

"Who was that letter from?"

She had not meant to ask.

He gave her a quick glance.

"So you read it? I thought it had been opened. I thought it might be Mrs. Brinley. She snoops all round me."

He grinned. "That 's all over."

He took off his hat, knelt, and drank. She watched him covertly, his broad shoulders, his flat back, his loins arched

and tense. He looked up again with water in his beard. Rose's lids drooped.

"I 've been foolish, Rose. But I never really meant it. I 'm done with that kind of thing now."

He met her eyes steadily. "That 's honest truth."

She made no sign.

His voice lowered.

"Have n't you ever thought of clearing out? Of running away from this place, from everything, just riding off clean away?"

Her breathing stopped. Her back straightened.

He saw that she understood.

Then she said, slowly, "Henry 's going to get a job, teaching in Syracuse. He 's written for it."

"Afraid? You need n't be afraid of me, you know." He made a wide gesture with his hand. "If that 's how you feel. . . ." He laughed. "Henry with a job! You need n't think of it. He won't go through with it."

He waited for her to speak, but she said nothing. Inside she was crying, "Go away, can't you? Leave me by myself."

He turned suddenly and was gone.

She knew now. . . . She sat quite still till the hush had swallowed the sound of his going. Henry must get his job. They must leave. Escape! Bascom had offered it. She felt ashamed.

She went slowly back when it grew cooler. But when she came out on the meadow again, she saw the barn. The men were coming down their ladders. It showed the work of their hands. Its great length lay along the meadow, like something still asleep, and the lowering sun was throwing its shadow far out over the grass.

She could not bear the thought of going.

VIII

THE BERRY PICKERS

The summer glided on insensibly. July had passed and August was well through. The days continued hot, but the nights were getting colder.

In the store, Uncle George dozed through the days, gathering news from those who came in on business. He held long conversations to which the others listened. He showed no increasing age, but he slept more, and at times he forgot his listeners, so that they escaped without his noticing them, and he went on reminiscing to the harness. Waking to find them gone, he would swing his white beard to the front store and say, "Ain't it so, Mercer?" And if Mercer were there, he would answer, "Yeanh, Uncle George, it 's truth." And the old man would nod soberly.

He held the valley news in his hands with their welted veins and dry thin calluses, but the outside world had lost its interest for him. He liked now to talk of the passing season, the cold, the heat, the rain; births interested him, and illnesses, and he took particular satisfaction in deaths. Mercer said of him, "Uncle George is town records. He can tell us when we 're born and who we married and what we died of. A man can go and ask him and find out the whole business and get it all without reading."

For instance, he knew of Lecky. He made a great proud story of the horsewhipping. "An old man, not so old as I be, but an old man leathering the hell right out of him." "Ralph is going to hear from that man before he 's done," Mercer said. "Yeanh, perhaps," said Uncle George. "But Ralph done right just the same. I 'd have done it myself." He looked round

defiantly. "Sure, Uncle George," said Mercer. "Sure. I don't doubt you could do it." "No," said the old man. And Mercer: "But Ralph had better watch that new barn. Lecky 's mean. He beats his wife." The old man swung his beard from right to left. "No, Mercer," he said. "A man that 's mean to his women won't hurt no animal. He won't hurt Ralph's cattle, he 'll hurt him." "Then Lecky had best be careful, ain't it so, Uncle George?" "I don't know, Mercer. That may be. But I guess Ralph won't ever know."

He knew the progress of the barn. "Wall plates is on three walls. They 've drawed the rafters in.

"Driscoll's wife is sick. Perhaps a baby. It 's time. I 'd been expecting that. I had three boys, but they are dead." "God rest them," said a man. Uncle George bent down his beard: "Amen."

He knew how the crops were coming. "Oats are fine this year, but wheat is headed thin. Potatoes good."

Young Samuel asked him one night, "They say Bascom is going around a lot with Henry's wife?" The old man looked at him severely: "So they say. They 're brother and sister-in-law." He had a sort of loyalty for Ralph; they had the common bond of age, but his resolution would not hold. "It 's in their blood. Not one of them can stand the sight of a pretty girl. And she is pretty, too. Smiles at me when I take eggs over. 'Hello, Uncle George,' she says. And we pass a little time." "You have an eye, too, Uncle George," Mercer said facetiously. The old man nodded. "Yeanh."

The women asked him about berries. Raspberries and garden crops were over, the picking still to come. The season for blackberries was at hand. "Blackberries?" he asked rhetorically. "I have n't been around the way I used to. But I know there 's a fine patch back of Gersholt's farm in Lyonsdale. Forty-acre piece burnt over five years back. Wilder's land. I remember clear as print the way it started on a patch of balsams and popple edging a beaver fly, and I seen it roaring through the grass. August, too, a Wednesday afternoon."

The word went round and the women got together. They sent two over to the Wilder farm to ask Ralph's permission

for a berry picking. They found him seated on his verandah in the mid-afternoon, half dozing.

"The first afternoon next week? Sure. Go ahead. We might send a party out from here."

"That would be fine," they said. He told Rose about it at supper. "Every one of those women have good berries at their back door, but they like picking — in a patch. Perhaps you 'd like to send a party of our women."

"Yes," said Rose. "I was wondering about them."

"You might as well, it 's my land."

Rose made arrangements for a cold lunch that Parchal could serve alone on Monday. Mrs. Smith would be in charge of the women. Lucy and Nance and the woman Ellen, who helped with the upstairs cleaning. Sunday night they got out pails and buckets which Mrs. Smith scalded and wiped till they shone. "Good heavens!" said Rose. "Can you fill all those?" Mrs. Smith smiled. "Yes, ma'am, blackberries take a lot of room. They don't pack down like other berries." "But with all the others, will there be enough berries?" "Yes indeed, ma'am. Uncle George says it 's a big patch. I don't think there will be such a lot picking. Perhaps fifteen and us." Rose said, suddenly, "I think I 'll come." Mrs. Smith looked slightly surprised. "It 'll be a hot long day. And then there 'll be all them women." "Oh, I would n't mind the sun." "I can take you to a good place in the back pasture some afternoon." Her voice gave Rose a clue; she was disturbed at the idea of the lady of the house mixing with the countrywomen in the actual familiarity of berrying. Rose laughed. "It will be fun. Joan and I 'll go. Joan said she wanted to." "She comes; she always has since she was little, and they all know her." "I 'll wear an old dress and my big sunbonnet," said Rose, "and you 'll be in charge of me." Mrs. Smith smiled. "Yes, why not?" she said suddenly.

Life at the farm had resumed its former quiet course. As the days went by with their steady routine, Rose found her forebodings quieted. Bascom kept himself in the background. At times she was aware of his watchful gaze, but he made no reference to their meeting in the night pasture. Henry was

brushing up his Latin, impatiently waiting further news from Syracuse. Ralph made reports each evening on the progress of the barn. Rose's sense of security had returned, and the execution of Lecky's dog sank into the past. . . .

They started out right after breakfast in the light farm wagon. George had put hay in the box for them to sit on. Rose and Joan climbed in and sat down with Lucy and Ellen. Joan was delighted that Rose had come, and the maids giggled at George and ostentatiously arranged their skirts over their plump ankles. Rose felt like a girl on her first picnic. Mrs. Smith climbed laboriously to the seat, which went down under her weight so that Nance slid down against her. Nance drove. The old man had ordered Ned for them, as he was a sensible horse and would make better time than the odd farm horse; and Nance had a knowledge of horses as good as any man's.

He had been rather grumpy over Rose's going, but he had offered no strenuous objection, and when Henry had tried to argue Rose out of the project, he had suddenly supported her. "It 's a good thing for her to see the women. If you took as big an interest in what was going on where you live you 'd not be wasting your time with those books."

It was a cloudless still day, so clear that the needles on the top boughs of the pines could be easily distinguished. Nance turned the wagon on to the short arm of the bridge, leading to the strip of land between the rivers. The boughs folded over them and they passed through patches of light and shadow, making a pretty picture of color in their faded cotton dresses. Rose had let her bonnet back on her shoulders so that the bow slipped up under her chin. She lay back in the hay, stretching out, and Lucy, with a sort of snicker, followed her example. Mrs. Smith turned round a trifle sternly, but seeing that it was Rose who had adopted this unladylike attitude, she chose to smile, and turned back. Rose could see part of her back protruding over the seat. Nance's thin figure did not show. She sent the horse along at a smart trot, and Rose closed her eyes. The road ran through sand, and the hay eased the slight jolts. For a little the girls talked in low voices or laughed em-

barrassedly, and the older women on the seat exchanged remarks between themselves. Their talk had an extreme conventionality. There was a slight feud between them in the matter of precedence, but they talked because they thought their dignity would be disturbed with silence. Nance had given Rose a passing glance. Beyond that she said nothing. To Rose she seemed slightly hostile, but there had never been friction between them. She drove with her eyes on the horse's ears, speaking monosyllabic words. Mrs. Smith seemed to feel it her duty to pass some remarks to Rose.

"Just to think that you 've never been berrying afore this! My! My!"

Rose smiled. "Yes. I hardly knew where to look for blackberries."

"These woods must look awful big and gloomy like to a person like you who has been in the city all their life."

"They do. I don't remember being in this state when I was a little girl, and we 've been in Boston ever since I can remember."

"My," said the girl Ellen, her square face lighting, "I 'd like to say that about myself. It makes a person sound so much more knowledged, sort of."

"Well, it has n't always helped me," Rose said. "You know I 'd kept buying those big trout of Loren Beck?"

"Yeanh." They all turned to her.

"Well, last night Bascom went out on the lawn. He found the old fellow down by the pool. You know Mr. Wilder likes to throw grasshoppers in for the trout he put in there — to watch them jump?"

"Yeanh." Their faces were absorbed. Anything resembling a story would keep them breathless.

"Well, Mr. Wilder had been saying how there seemed to be fewer jumping all the time. He thought a mink had got into the pool. But I never thought about it. And Bascom found the old man with a pole and three trout. He owned right up. So you see, even if I have been in the city, Ellen, I did n't know enough to get suspicious, and just went on buying our own trout."

They all laughed, a little dubiously, as if not knowing whether too much laughter would be well received, since the tale was on the mistress.

"He ought to be punished, somehow," Mrs. Smith said, feeling that that was a suitable remark.

"Oh, no," said Joan. "Poor old man. Everyone knows he 's half-witted."

The laughter this time was high and prolonged. Mrs. Smith slapped her knees and repeated, "Half-witted, but sly." Even Nance chuckled drily. Joan puzzled for a moment. Then she too joined in.

Ellen said after a minute, "Just the same, I don't see how anyone could guess."

"But there are so many other things I would n't know if I did n't have you to help me. About berries, for instance, I would n't know when they come."

Lucy tried to turn the conversation. "I like blackberrying. They pick easy and they have n't got the nasty bugs on them other berries have. My Pa calls them clean." She was caught in an anecdote and swept on: "I mind how he was eating raspberries one night and come onto a stinkbug. Gracious land! His face was the awfulest thing! He went to spit it out, but the bug had got into a hole in his tooth and he would n't come. He hung on terrible tight, and Ma had to dig him loose with a pin!"

Her face turned suddenly brick-red and she glanced at Rose. They all glanced at one another, then suddenly laughed. Lucy joined in with a high gust, and in her relief out-laughed them all.

"It was a picture! Gracious land!"

Mrs. Smith cut her short; but they went on more brightly, talking odd lore and gossip, and once Nance told them a story about wolves coming down out of the mountains in the early days, and treeing two men in dead winter. Uncle George had told her the story. They had hung on in spite of the cold. People had heard the wolves, but they did not find the men. Only in spring the bones of one of them had been discovered under a tree by a man who was looking for a calf. But be-

cause there were two skulls, he looked up and saw the skeleton of the other, astride a limb, arms about the trunk of the tree. They had made sure of identification by the trouser buttons of one of them. His young wife had bought them from a peddler the fall before, and they were of a special design.

Nance told the tale with a grim relish, and the young women fell silent. They had passed the three houses that made the village of Lyonsdale, three close-set farms, and entered a rough timber track where the horse had to walk and the wagon pitched in and out of deep holes, its kingbolt screeching as the reach twisted, and the shadow of the uncut forest was cold about them. Only on the upper leaves they could see the sun lying in golden planes.

They were relieved to break into the clearing and the open air, and feel the sun's heat strike their shoulders almost with the force of a blow, and to hear voices, scattered here and there. Rose pulled her sunbonnet back onto her head, sat up, and looked round her from under the wide pink brim.

The burned tract lay all about her, covering low knolls. In spots poplar trees had begun to thrust up above the tangle of brakes and berry vines, their slender white stems supporting delicate canopies of neat leaves. An early frost had left its effects. The brakes were turning yellow and the blackberry leaves showed streaks of maroon.

Now and then, among the vines, Rose caught glimpses of print dresses and heard women talking. Their voices sounded happy and gay. The foliage of the unburned woods that fringed the clearing was grey in the dry heat. Behind them the track they had been following showed no opening. The wagon seemed to have been suddenly set down in the midst of the wilderness.

Nance drove to the highest knoll where a few maples had escaped the fire. Here the wagons of the others stood; and the horses, unhitched from the shafts, were tied to branches. They stood with hips slung for comfort, their heads together, drowsing. Nance swung down in her big boots, unhitched Ned, and found him a place among them. Rose watched enviously her quick sure movements. The horses stood aside

and one or two sniffed Ned, as if he were an old acquaintance. The others looked at him. A silent sort of introduction seemed to be made, then the heads of all the horses dropped.

The two girls had gone into the vines, but their progress was still audible by the greetings given them and an occasional burst of laughter. Mrs. Smith had lifted the buckets out of the wagon. Nance came back to help her. She said to Rose, "I brought you a belt. I thought maybe I could show you about picking."

"Thanks, Nance."

Rose noticed that Joan was buckling a belt loosely over her hips. Mrs. Smith had a kind of harness of stout cloth.

"My middle part is too big now for comfort," she said, laughing. "If you go with Nance, ma'am, you 'll get the best berries, I don't doubt. She 's a witch for finding them."

Nance grinned.

Mrs. Smith went off with a wave of her plump hand. Joan followed her. Rose heard some of the women saying, "Hello Joan," and Joan's strong voice answering.

"Here you are." Nance handed her a belt: "Run the belt through the handle of this pail. That leaves you both hands for picking. When you 've filled up, if you want to keep on picking, bring it back here to empty in the buckets. But don't try too hard. It 's hard work till you get used to it."

Rose followed her instructions and found the three-quart pail resting comfortably against her legs, slightly cold through her thin clothes.

"Now you keep after me. Don't come too close or the vines 'll whip you."

Rose turned her attention to the vines. They rose in a wall from the edge of the knoll, and though from the wagon they had seemed only waist-high, she now saw that they stood well above her head. They did not grow straight, but interlaced each other in curves, bending over their laden tops. They had looked an even dry green from the wagon box, except where the frost had colored the leaves red. But from close to she could see that they had many colors: the stems maroon, the leaves grey-green, the berries, according to their stage of

development, green, white, orange-red, or black. The spines were hard, thick set, and much longer tipped than she had supposed. They offered to her inexperienced eye an impenetrable wall.

But Nance swung toward them without hesitating.

"They look bad, but we 'll find tracks."

She turned slantingly into them, and, following, Rose found herself in a beaten path wide enough to permit her to pass easily if she ducked her head under the bigger stalks.

Nance said briefly, "Bear."

She pushed ahead lithely, her grey hair bared. She had on a faded green dress that was almost the color of the leaves. Rose realized that if she lost sight of her for an instant she would be invisible. She made scarcely a sound, for all her heavy shoes.

They took a way toward one of the corners of the clearing. Twice Rose stopped, tempted by the big berries within easy reach of her hand. But Nance said, "Not here," and explained the second time: "See their shape. They 're square-ended. Taste one." Rose obeyed. "It 's very sweet." The juice ran out of the seed meat at a touch. She ate another. It left a bluish stain on her under lip. Nance said, "Just remember the taste."

Twice they passed voices on the other side of the clump. "Hello, there," called the women. "Hello," said Nance. The women tittered. "That 's Nance." Behind her Rose heard them speaking, and caught the words, "Old Ralph's Nance."

The second time they were hailed by a single voice. It carried a slightly uneasy intonation.

"It 's me," Nance said. "Not a bear."

The woman laughed nervously. Nance chuckled.

"If you see a bear, don't get scared. Don't bother him and he won't bother you. Just move away slow."

Their passage stirred up dust of a peculiar dry cutting quality as Rose breathed it. The grass under their feet was long, grey, and brittle. Presently they came to the edge of the clearing. Here the vines were taller and slimmer, the leaves greener; but Rose saw fewer berries.

"It does n't look as good to me," she said to Nance.

"No?"

Nance led her into the shade of the woods. The voices behind them had died out. They might have been alone of all people on earth.

Rose had been looking back. Suddenly she turned. The old woman was close beside her, her peculiar mahogany-colored eyes fixed on the girl's.

"Let me show you something."

She lifted a drooping stalk with her arm and let her fingers stray under the leaves. In an instant she had withdrawn it. The thin fingers and palm cupped a heap of berries. They were so black that in the shadow they looked purple and had blue lights on them. They grew much longer than the berries that had tempted Rose, and were pointed, tapering evenly from the shoulder to the tip.

"Taste one."

Rose tried one. It lay on her tongue cool and sweet, and without having to break it with her teeth the juice flowed out almost of its own accord. It had a peculiar sweet woody taste, like a kind of wine.

"Eh?" The old woman was staring at her. "Different, ain't it?"

"Heavens, yes!" Rose exclaimed.

Nance sniffed, "Them women back there. They don't know nothing. When I bring these in they think I 'm a witch."

"I don't wonder."

"Now you 've learnt. There 's lots of things for anybody to learn. When to take hold and when to go away."

Rose returned her stare.

"How did you learn?"

Nance laughed.

"Some of it was born in me, I guess. My grandmother was part Injun. I was not talking about berryin'."

"Oh?"

"No. It 's best to know everything you 're monkeying with."

Her eyes had hardened; their capacity increased. She stood on an old log, so that her face was on a level with Rose's. Both were quite still: the old woman poised easily; Rose erect and

rigid. Suddenly her breast lifted and her color came. She turned away for an instant and picked a handful of berries as she had seen Nance pick them. They fell into her pail with a slight thud. The tiny sound was like a drip of water in the still place.

"I don't know what business it is of yours, Nance."

"I nursed him. And I 've been with Ralph since before he got married."

The old voice was dispassionate.

"You think he 's in love with me?"

"Yeanh. I know it. Not bad, yet, maybe. Go away. You 'll only spoil things."

"There 's nothing happened. There won't be anything."

"What do you know, a girl like you?" The old voice was scornful.

"There won't," Rose cried passionately.

"You don't know Bascom."

"I love Henry. I 'm a good wife. Bascom 's kissed me. Why should n't he?"

"You 're a good wife."

"I did n't ask it."

"How do you know?"

"I did not. What are you saying? I don't love him. I hate him."

"Uh!" Nance turned away. "Don't cry."

Suddenly she was gone.

Rose stood by herself. She could hear no sound. Her breast heaved and her lower lip was caught in her teeth. For an instant her knees sagged and her color left her. Then it returned in a flood. Without looking up, she began to pick.

Her hands fumbled and at first her shaking fingers let some berries fall. But she kept at the work doggedly.

"The old witch!" she said aloud. "The old beast!"

She remembered a small oath and said it. Then she flushed. But she went on picking till she had filled the pail.

She turned to go back to the wagon, but the wall of berry bushes cut off her view. Overhead she could see the branches marking the edge of the clearing, but she could not remember

whether they had come from left or right. There was no sound to guide her.

"Nance!"

She got no answer.

"Nance!" She called again, louder. But again she had no reply.

The weighted pail tugged at her waist, and she unfastened the belt and took it in her hand. She opened her lips to call again; then she flushed, shook her head, and walked resolutely into the sunlight.

She found a path winding through the brambles and followed it. Its continual turns confused her, but she kept on. Once in a while she paused to listen. Three times she found a fork. After ten minutes she saw the branches of trees over her head and realized that she was still on the edge of the clearing.

Her arm ached from carrying the pail. She sat down on a log to catch her breath and pulled the bonnet back from her forehead. Her whole face burned crimson and her eyes were dark with anger. But she sat quite still for several minutes. Out before her the sun shone through the vines and a swarm of yellow jackets hummed in and out in golden sparks.

When she had cooled off, Rose set out again. This time she chose a mark twenty feet off in the clearing and noted its position in relation to the sun. But the sun was close to noon height and gave no help. Nevertheless, she went to the marked bush. As she neared it, she saw straight ahead a small poplar, and made her way to that. Beyond she found another and repeated the manœuvre. In this way she went on for a quarter of an hour. Her anger was deserting her; the dust parched her throat; she began to feel tired.

She paused again and again to listen, but she heard nothing till she came to an old stump. It was several feet high and so broad that she took her next sight before reaching it to make sure that she would not be thrown from her direction in going round.

Then she heard a woman exclaim, "Oh! Oh!"

Relief gushed over her; she felt weak and hurried round.

She saw a small woman staring out of deep blue eyes at her. She wore a faded dress, and the bonnet, back on her head, showed her reddish hair. She was pretty, almost a child. Rose said, smiling, "I 'm so glad I found you. I got lost and called, but no one answered and I 've been walking around for half an hour."

The girl said nothing, but continued her stare. Suddenly Rose noticed her cheeks going whiter and whiter. She gave a little gasp and slumped silently to the ground. Her bucket dropped from her thin hand, teetered and fell over, emptying a purple stream.

Rose started to rush to her. But before she had taken two steps a sound halted her.

She swung round, and realized what had made the girl faint. Her own face went white, but she remembered what Nance had said: "Don't bother him and he won't bother you."

A large black bear was sitting in the path along which she had come. He seemed quite unafraid, and regarded both of the girls out of little blinking pig's eyes. He was so close that Rose could see the working of his pointed nose. Suddenly he sat up and with a ludicrous gesture folded his paws on his belly, his eyes closed and his lip lifted. He appeared to grin.

Rose did not move. For a full minute he rocked himself gently. Then without a sound he dropped to all fours and went back the way he had come. She had one glimpse of him reaching up a paw to rake some berries into his mouth.

She sat down like a lump and just saved her own pail from overturning.

Then she turned to the other. The girl's eyelids were quivering and her mouth trembled. Her face looked so pale and thin that Rose wanted to cry. She wished for water, but knew that if she left the girl she would have no way of finding the way back to her. She dragged her into the shade of the stump, — what little shade there was, — and opened her dress and started to chafe her wrists.

After a moment the eyes opened.

Rose said, "Lie still a little."

The eyes looked at her gratefully and the head sank back

against her shoulder. Rose lifted the body to a more comfortable position. Her eye was caught by the girl's figure. She felt alarmed. She ought not to have been allowed to come out carrying a child.

"Do you feel better?"

The girl said, "Yeanh," timidly.

"Do you know where you are?"

The girl shook her head. "I got mixed up and was trying to find my way back. My husband was coming for me right after lunch."

"He ought n't to have let you come at all," Rose said indignantly.

"He did n't want to. But I wanted to."

"Why did n't you stay near the others?"

"Why, I 'm supposed to be a good picker. I know where the long ones are. See — Oh," she wailed.

"Never mind. I 'm going to pick them up." Rose leaned her against the stump and began picking up the berries. "Thank you," said the girl softly.

"How did you get lost?" Rose asked.

"I don't get lost easy. But I was sick and my head ached." The voice was pathetic, eager for sympathy and confidence. "It 's my first one and I 've been feeling kind of miserable."

"Poor dear."

"Were you ever in love?"

"Yes." Rose turned her a look over her shoulder. The face was still very white and had shadows under the eyes. They were big and more childlike than before.

"I fell in love after I got married." She seemed to be talking half to herself. "He used to come to see me, but he does n't any more."

Rose finished picking up the berries. "See," she held the bucket up, "I 've hardly missed one!"

"Oh, thank you." The voice was diffident. "My name 's Pearl — would you tell me yours?"

Rose's face whitened.

"I'm Rose," she said softly, but she did not look at Pearl.

"Oh." A pause. "Then you 're she."

For a moment Rose thought the girl was going to faint again. She herself felt the blood in her head. The big blue eyes were seriously watching her. They seemed to plead.

She said suddenly, "I 'll stay with you. We 've got to get out together."

The eyes almost thanked her, but the mouth was tight closed and said nothing.

Rose stirred uneasily.

"We 'll have to get you out. Don't you feel stronger? Never mind him now. Try to remember how you got here."

The girl put a hand to her forehead. "I can't. My head aches so."

"You must," Rose said fiercely.

"Try calling."

Rose looked about her. The shadow of the stump had lengthened. It must be well on into the afternoon. It was strange they had not missed her at lunch time. Then she remembered that their lunches had been put up in separate packages, and that they had planned to get them when they wanted them. She called; her husky voice seemed not to reach beyond the first wall of bushes. Her throat was dry. It hurt her to call, but she tried again.

Suddenly a voice answered. "This way," Rose called.

Down the path the bear had come Nance walked, behind her Joan. Behind Joan came the tall man Rose had seen unloading stone with Bascom on the day the barn was started — Driscoll. His dark face peered anxiously over the heads of the two women. When he saw the girl, his step quickened, and he went with long limps to her side. He leaned over and picked her up as if she had no weight.

Nance was looking at them both.

"Uh," she said. "Sick."

Her dark eyes took in the girl's figure and the girl turned away. Her face was unreadable. Her husband's shoulder was lifted for it to rest on, but she kept it raised.

He turned to Rose with a sullen glance.

"My wife 's not well. I ought n't to have let her come. She 's going to have a baby."

He turned away.

"My berries," said the girl.

"I 'll bring them," Joan said. Her homely face was puzzled, her freckled brow wrinkled. Her broad mouth trembled.

"The poor girl, so white," she said to Rose.

Rose saw Nance grimly watching. She barely heard her walking behind. She felt tired out, and when they reached the wagons she climbed in and lay down on the hay. The buckets were all heaping full with blue-black fruit. The women looked hot and dusty. They were saying good-bye loudly.

"Nance said you got lost," said Mrs. Smith anxiously to Rose. "It 's a shame. I hope the sun did n't hurt you."

"No, not at all."

"It was a good berrying."

Nance manœuvred Ned skillfully. They were the first wagon to leave and soon distanced the others.

For a while Mrs. Smith kept glancing back and calling good-night in her hearty cheerful voice. Rose lay still and said nothing. The cool of evening was entering the woods through which they went silently home.

IX

INTO EDEN GARDEN

1

On the evening of their return from the berry patch, Joan had been taken sick. Rose had not seen her fall; she had barely noticed the tense line of Joan's mouth on the way home and the restless, almost fearful, sidewise stare. It had been too dark in the woods to read it. The wagon had stopped at the verandah steps, and Rose had got down stiffly. She had mounted one step when she heard the odd whistling breath that was half a cry, and she had turned to see Joan lying in the gravel with her eyes rolled back. Nance had already sprung down and was holding her hand in Joan's mouth. Rose could see the teeth clamped shut on the two fingers, but the old woman gave no sign of pain.

"Get Bascom," she said over her shoulder, "he can carry her in."

Rose found Bascom in the hall.

"Joan," she said breathlessly.

He understood at once and ran out.

"I 've fixed her tongue," Nance said. "But she got my fingers."

He picked up his sister. As a piece of controlled strength it was worth watching. He lifted her without heaving and carried her in his arms up the stairs to her room. Rose followed. When he had put her down on the bed, he said, "Undress her. I 'll get Dr. Jerry."

In an instant he had gone. Nance came in and helped Rose undress her. When they had her between the sheets, Rose said, "What 's the matter with her?"

"It 's one of her spells. Not a bad one. She 'll get over it."

Nance snuffed the candles, all but one. Rose saw her hand. Joan's teeth had ground through the skin of the two fingers; the flesh was raw.

"Oh, Nance!" A slight shiver went through her, — blood always sickened her, — but she stopped it, catching her under lip in her teeth.

"Yeanh?" said the old woman, questioningly, her dark eyes on Rose.

"Go down to the kitchen and get a basin of hot water and come back here with it — no, I 'll go myself. You stay with Joan."

She hurried down for the hot water and returned presently with it and some cotton strips and a jar of salve. She set them down on the bureau by the candle. "Come over here."

Nance suddenly put her hand behind her skirts and said, "No."

Rose said, "Yes."

After an instant, Nance obeyed. Rose took the hand and bathed the fingers as gently as she could. They did not once twitch. When she had satisfied herself that the wound was clean, she anointed them and started to bandage.

"I 'm not very clever at it," she said with a little laugh. She looked up. Nance smiled grimly.

"Well, it could be worse. I guess you have n't done it much. If you took your bonnet off, the strings would n't get in the way."

Then she showed Rose how to turn the bandage neatly. When the job was done, she said, "Thanks," and moved toward the door. "I 'll go now and get Dan's supper."

"Let him come up to the kitchen to-night."

"No. This don't bother one, this kind of thing."

She was gone. Rose sat alone. Joan's face was big and pale, the coarse hair sprawled in loose coils on the pillow. Rose found her hairbrush and began brushing it out gently. She heard steps in the hall and downstairs voices talking in the odd whisper peculiar to sickness. Then heavier footfalls coming slowly along toward the door. A rap.

Rose opened it. Ralph was standing there. Under their usual red his cheeks had a greyness and he was breathing hard. His grey eyes looked past her shoulder to the bed, and Rose saw his lips tremble.

"She has n't had one for a long time." He did not offer to go in, but stood close beside her. He looked suddenly scared and helpless.

"I can't get used to anyone getting sick."

His voice was almost complaining. Rose touched his arm and he caught her hand, squeezed till she could have cried out.

"Thank you, Rose. Thank you."

"Bascom 's gone for the doctor. He 'll be right here."

"Yes. Good. Jerry 's a good man; he knows. That 's good."

"I 'll stay here, Father. I won't want any supper. Have Parchal bring up some tea."

"Yes, yes. I 'll have Parchal bring up some tea. I need supper. You 're a good girl, Rose."

He went away on heavy tiptoes. She could hear his hard breathing till he turned the corner. While she stood in the door, Henry came past from his study.

"What 's the matter?"

"Joan 's sick."

"Oh. She 'll get over it all right. She 's had them before. You look sick yourself, Rose. Better come down and rest."

"No, I 'll stay here. I 'm having supper here. Go down with your father."

He went away and Rose reëntered the room. The confidence in his voice had been encouraging. She sat down beside the bed. Joan had not moved.

It was half dark with the one candle and the drawn shade. The house seemed to hold an unnatural quiet. Rose looked round the room, at the plain homely furniture, the bureau with the small mirror, the open bookshelves covered with rows and rows of bird nests. It might have been a boy's room, but for the long hair of the head on the pillow, the silver hairbrush, and a vase of goldenrod and bottle gentian. Rose bent forward until her face was hidden in her hands. . . .

She was roused by a tap on the door. Bascom stood there

with a small smiling man who carried a brown leather bag in one hand and a weather-beaten grey hat in the other. He had a small white pointed beard and very light sparkling blue eyes. He did not look like a doctor, for his trousers were tucked into his big laced boots, and the shirt was a workman's of dark blue flannel, without stock or tie.

"This is Dr. Jerry, Rose. My sister-in-law."

He nodded to her rather than bowed, it was so quickly done.

"I don't get much chance to keep up with the Wilders. There 's so seldom anything the matter with them."

He went past her to the bed. Bascom stood beside Rose while he bent over Joan. Rose had heard of Dr. Jerry. He was not yet fifty years old, but his hair was snow-white. His skin was seamed with long hours of winter driving. It was said that he went anywhere in any weather to anyone who sent for him. He kept three pairs of horses which were second to none. If any man had a good horse he wanted to try, he put him up against the doctor's fast teams. He had to be a good driver to keep the road beside the little man who drove with a fearlessness bordering on foolhardiness.

He turned from the bed suddenly.

"She 's all right. I 'll come over in the morning. She 'll be all right and awake in a minute. Just don't say anything about the fit to her," he said to Rose.

"Fit?"

"Yes. I won't tell Ralph. Any sickness upsets him so. You ought to have seen him the only time in his life he had a colic." The blue eyes twinkled. "Yes, she's a mild epileptic. She may outgrow it. Anyway, there 's nothing to do but keep her quiet for a few days."

"Oh."

"Don't let it worry you. I 've got to go along."

"Have some supper first," said Bascom.

"No, thanks kindly. I 've got to get up Leyden way to see a woman who 's having trouble with a child. Driscoll's wife. He says she had a fright this afternoon and acts bad. She isn't due by two weeks."

"Good night."

He was gone. They heard his horses starting down the drive. They went at a run.

Bascom said, "He 'll take those gateposts faster than I 'd want to on horseback."

He looked down at Rose.

"You 're tired."

"A little," she said.

"I 'll stay with you. Hello! Here 's Parchal with a pot of tea."

Parchal, eyes modestly downcast, entered the room and set down the tray.

"The cook"— he always called his wife the cook while he was on duty — "sent up some chicken."

Bascom chuckled. He drew up the washstand and made a supper table of it. "Now eat a regular meal, Rose. I 'll be butler."

"No. I don't want any food. Just tea."

He poured it for her. "Then I 'll eat the chicken," he said. "Poor Joan. What started her?"

Rose said suddenly, "I got lost and found Mrs. Driscoll. A bear came out and scared her so she fainted. Nance and Joan and Driscoll found us late in the afternoon."

His bright coloring did not change, but his mouth lost its smile. He ate for a minute quite quietly, his eyes on the plate. Rose let her eyes rest on his bright hair, noting the soft curls over the temples. Then her eyes wandered to the pale face on the pillow. Her eyes filled, and when he looked up in an instant she saw his eyes, too, filled.

She forgot the berrying and Joan. She was no longer afraid of him. She felt so sorry.

"Dear." She whispered it. But she saw him start. The sorrow still lay on his eyes, but something else was beginning to shine in them. His mouth smiled.

"Rose." He whispered. "Rose."

He did not offer to get up.

They sat staring into each other's eyes. Rose forgot Nance's words, forgot Henry, forgot the baby Driscoll's wife was carrying and which in her heart she knew to be Bascom's. The

room was dim and her eyes dim; she sat straight, seeing only Bascom. She was right, she was right — she heard her heart saying it. In the still room, on either side of the washstand, they sat looking across a pot of tea, in the eyes of each something utterly and unutterably new.

Then the flame of the candle trembled in a breath of air. Rose looked up. Joan was staring at them out of wide eyes.

Neither Rose nor Bascom moved.

The pale face shifted, the lips trembled. Joan said, "Why don't you speak?"

Rose asked in a low voice, "What do you want us to say?"

"Why am I here?"

"You were tired, dear."

Joan made a slight motion of holding out her hands.

"Yes." Then, "Kiss me, Rose. Now you, Bascom."

They obeyed. She sighed, closed her eyes. In an instant she was sleeping. They looked up from the pillowed head and found each other's eyes.

"She 'll be all right now," Bascom said.

"Yes."

"You 'd better go to bed, Rose."

"Yes."

"Good night, dear."

"Good night."

She shivered slightly as she went through the door, his glance following her. She was tired. Her room was dark and she did not light candles. She let her clothes drop where she stood, and slipped into bed. She lay quite still, her eyes on the window. The pine boughs made a dark pattern against the soft sky. She slept.

2

On the following morning it was obvious that by mid-week Joan would be well. Rose was sitting with her, examining birds' nests, while Joan, delighted at her interest, described them and the habits of their builders. Her intimate knowledge was surprising. Rose had thought of birds as pretty things, with

bright colors or soft, which sang sweetly, or quaintly, or not at all. As Joan told her about them, she began to see that their lives held as many interests and emotions as her own. Joan knew how the chipping sparrow and the other ground birds, when crows came across the fields, would fly over to the swamp where the blackbirds nested and bring back the males with their red epaulets to drive off the nest hunters; how the barn swallows tipped their nest with the blue soft clay under the banks and built the rest of mud. Each nest had a story. One sparrow nest had three skeletons — two of tiny birds, and one an animal's with a long tail lying on the outer rim. "I found them in the grass. Only one of the birds was in the nest. The other was close to the deer mouse. I saved them all. He had killed one and he and the other had both died." Her eyes grew sad. The small birds had so many enemies. The shrike who speared them on thorns, the mice, the weasels, the chipmunks. But in the air they sang.

Dr. Jerry came in to them. His cheeks were pink from his driving.

"Good morning. How are you?"

"Fine," Joan said, and smiled.

"There 's quite a nip to the air. Almost a frost last night." He looked Joan over.

"You 'll do."

He was in no hurry this morning, and for a while he sat with the two girls.

"How is Mrs. Driscoll?" Rose asked him.

"She 's rather miserable, but there 's nothing to worry about. She 's not as strong as other countrywomen and she 's tried to do too much. She 'll have to stay pretty quiet."

"I found her yesterday, you know."

"Yes, I 'd heard."

"Do you think I could take her anything?"

He looked at her speculatively.

"Why, yes. Anything. Her husband looks after her like a nurse. But she has n't many women friends, and just now all the women are pretty busy."

When he had gone, Rose went down to the kitchen. She

selected some jars of preserves and a ham and some bread. The girl would not be able to cook much probably, and these would help out her husband. She put them in a pair of saddlebags she found in the hall closet. Just before lunch she picked some asters.

At the table she said, "I think I 'll take a ride this afternoon. Poor Mrs. Driscoll is sick and I thought I 'd take her some things."

Henry said, "Send them up with George. You 'd better be quiet to-day. You were pretty tired yesterday."

She looked at Bascom. They had met perfectly casually that morning. Now she must have had an invitation in her eyes. He glanced at her and seemed to say, "Yes."

"Why don't you come with me?" she asked Henry.

"No, thanks," he said. "If you 're going I 'd just be in the way."

The old man said, "Yes, why not go?" He seemed pleased.

George tied on the saddlebags for her. The small bunch of asters she carried in her hand, her wrist through a loop of string. Dainty pawed the ground with a small hoof and wiggled herself at the unaccustomed touch of the saddlebags. But she went quietly enough.

George had given Rose her directions. "Take the middle arm of the bridge, and at every turn-off go straight ahead. You 'll come to a cemetery just beyond the Leyden turn-off. There 's a little track runs down to the river. The farm 's at the end. About seven mile."

She took an easy pace, half expecting that Bascom might overtake her, but she saw no sign of him. The road was easy to follow.

The tiny farm with its barnyard surrounded with trees and the river just beyond would have looked very pretty if it had not been for the pathetic evidences of a woman's attempt to beautify it. The hollyhock beside the doorstep grew like a last survivor of an ancient race, small leaves and thin brown seed stalk above the grass. A few straggling asters grew in an old tub set in the ground. They were so small and forlorn that, on an impulse, Rose threw away the bunch

she was carrying. Henry's asters seemed enormous gorgeous things in contrast.

At Dainty's step, three ducks came in single file round the corner of the barn, and behind a fence under some beech trees, pigs stirred, grunted, and sighed. A cat on the porch got up, yawned, put up its tail, and came forward. It was her greeting.

Rose hesitated before dismounting. Then the color rose in her cheeks and she slipped down. As her feet touched the ground, the door opened and Driscoll came out.

"Good afternoon."

He stood still, regarding her out of his brown eyes. His face still bore a somewhat sullen look, but Rose gave him her best smile.

"Dr. Jerry told me your wife was feeling rather badly still. I thought it might be hard for you to get cooking done, so I brought a few things for you."

He paused. For an instant he seemed about to refuse her gifts.

Then he said, "Thank you. It 's very nice of you." And he came forward and untied the bags. He led Dainty over to the barn door and hitched her to a ring. His manners seemed careful.

"You 'd like to see her?"

"Yes, just for a minute."

He led her in, carrying the bags.

He apologized for not showing her into the tiny parlor, took her through the kitchen, which Rose saw was bare but neat, into a bedroom that opened off the end of it.

The girl lay on a homemade bed. She sat up to greet her visitor, and Rose heard the string spring squeak. She still looked pale, her eyes slightly clouded.

"Who is it?" she asked her husband.

"Mrs. Wilder, Pearl."

He smoothed out the top quilt. The shade was drawn at the window, the window tight closed. It was stuffy and smelt heavily of the woolen bedding.

The girl's pale cheeks colored.

"I 'm sorry I did n't get up."

"No, no," said Rose. "I was out for a ride, and I thought I 'd be neighborly and see how you were. I brought some things for your husband to eat, thinking it would save you some cooking."

"Thank you." It was gravely and politely said.

Driscoll opened the bags and produced the ham, bread, and preserves.

"They look real good," he said.

"It will help not to have to bake. The heat is so hard for me," said the girl.

Rose felt uncomfortable.

"Is n't there anything more I can do? I 'd like to."

"No, thank you, my husband 's a great help."

She gave a thin little smile.

"He 'd have made a better wife than I."

The man blushed. "No," his eyes said emphatically.

Rose wondered if he guessed. She wondered if there had been two meanings to those words. Something humble lay behind the girl's eyes, and Rose, in a strange way, suddenly felt humiliated. The complete, grave dignity of both overwhelmed her. She said, again, helplessly, "I wish I could do something."

"It 's very nice of you, Mrs. Wilder."

Driscoll said to her, "She gets tired easy. It 's hard to keep her down. I can do all the work, but she does n't believe it."

Rose took the hint.

"Good-bye."

The girl gave her her hand, then let her head lie back. Driscoll followed Rose into the kitchen, closing the door after them.

"It 's very kind of you, Mrs. Wilder," he said in a low voice.

"Is n't there really anything?"

"No."

"If you want a woman when the time comes, won't you send down to us? Mrs. Smith would be glad to come. That might be better than my coming."

"Thank you," he said. "I 'll remember."

Rose knew that he would not.

"There are n't many of your family would have thought of coming," he went on, speaking carefully. "But I think it 's hard for her to see strangers."

Rose said shortly, "Very well."

She was biting her lip. She wanted to cry out, "All right, all right! I won't come! I won't do anything!"

He said, "Mr. Wilder 's been decent to me, but he owed us a debt for his father. We do business, but we don't visit." He limped ahead of her into the barnyard and tied the saddlebags on.

"It's a pretty mare," he said, as if he were trying to make up for what he had said indoors. He helped her to mount. She looked down at his dark face, but read nothing in the sad eyes.

"Thank you," he said again.

She touched the mare and went down the narrow road at a gallop. But in a moment she had restored the mare to an even gait. She still felt her helplessness; she wanted comfort.

At the turn into the main road, she saw the white bitch sitting upon her stern and watching for her out of grave eyes that reminded her oddly of Driscoll's. Behind her was the grey mare and Bascom sitting at ease.

He brought Belle up beside her as if he had been riding with her from the start and merely waited while she made a call. His blue eyes surveyed her. Rose felt her grip tighten on the reins. "You here again, Bascom?" He said nothing, but turned both horses on up the road. After a quarter of a mile, he asked, "How was she?"

Rose said quietly, "She does not look well. I guess she 'll be all right."

"Alone?"

"Her husband looks after her like a nurse."

He rode with his eyes on his hands.

"Poor girl," he said; and in a moment, "I never liked him. But he 's quite a man."

Rose said nothing.

"Poor girl," he said, again.
Rose flushed.

3

It was a clear cool afternoon, the horses were eager. Rose, with the exercise, felt her blood mounting. When Bascom asked, "Would you like a pretty long ride?" she said, "Yes." He said, "I 'll take you up a way across the river. There 's a nice view from a hill near Sugar River." Rose knew that he wanted to talk.

An hour's brisk ride brought them to a bridge across the river. They mounted the opposite slope to the canal at a walk. Off the road beyond the canal, bridge bars let them into a pasture and a cow path took them upward. The bitch went ahead as if on familiar territory. Bascom said, "I come here quite often."

Halfway up the hill stood a small white house with a small barn. "That 's where Jones lived. He was a queer old character. Made some money on the Erie and came up here to settle down. He found a rock on this place with a queer mark like a snake in it, and he thought he 'd found the garden of Eden. He did n't have to farm. His boat cook made him marry her and she lives here alone now, an opulent widow."

There was something bright and cheerful about the house. It had a satisfied aspect in its clean paint behind the apple trees. Rose said, "What a strange idea! Did he believe it?"

"Yes. He used to sit on the porch looking over the valley. If there was a visitor, he just pointed at the valley, and said 'Ain't it proof?' He died of a liver complaint."

They passed the house. On Ephraim Jones's porch sat his widow in a bright-red wool shawl. She filled the rocker she sat in. Her face was red and full as the tomatoes in the bowl beside her. She held a paper with one hand and a tomato with the other. She had to tilt her head back to catch the flood of juice, and when she took a bite her double chins seemed to slide into her throat, and then to come out again as her actual chin came down. She waved the paper jovially at the riders.

A tomcat, as fat as she, who had crowded himself on to her lap and in under her middle, poked out his head and watched them past with sleepy green eyes.

"They say she has her own ideas of the Garden of Eden," Bascom said, "but I 've never asked her."

From the top of the hill they had a view up and down the valley. To the south and east the forest lay unbroken. Northward the farms began, little green patches here and there.

They dismounted.

"It 's beautiful," Rose said.

"Yes. I like to sit here when I 've something bothering me. I don't wonder at old Jones. This is the stone."

About two feet taller than the grass was a huge piece of limestone. It was about ten feet square and the top was smooth, as if the winter wind had polished it. But in the middle Rose saw the mark of the snake.

"How queer!" She traced it with her finger. It was about five feet in length and curled back and forth. "What made it?"

"Lord knows."

"That 's a funny dent by the head."

"Yes."

At the thick end of the "snake" was an oval depression about two inches deep at the "snake's" neck and at the head gradually shelving up to the surface of the rock.

They studied it a while together before they sat down. A stiff breeze whipped their cheeks. A little way off the mares nibbled the grass side by side. The hound had lain down in the lee of the stone. Except for the sound of the wind and the crunching of the horses' teeth in the grass, there was nothing to hear. They might have been alone together on the earth. "Adam and Eve," Rose said to herself. She gave Bascom a quick glance. He was hugging his knees to his chest; there was a slight smile on his red lips; his blue eyes were half closed. With her hand she could feel the mark of the snake. She squared her shoulders.

"Rose," he said in a low voice, "did you mean what you said last night?"

She bent forward, her eyes lost in the valley; and her fingers still played in the mark behind her back.

"I think so. Yes."

He swung round on her.

"I don't know." Her voice trembled. "It was something so new, so sudden. I don't know what to say. I felt tired."

"I know," he said softly. Then his voice took on a colder note. "By all rights I 've not lived a good life. You have. I ought to know exactly what it was, and I don't."

His face was very red. She had never seen him blush before.

"There 's one thing, Bascom. There 's Pearl Driscoll."

He did not hesitate.

"Yes. She is n't the first. I did n't know before this. I must have just been filling in my time."

"She 's going to have a baby."

"Yes. I don't know about that."

Rose was thinking of the letter. And as if he had understood, he answered her.

"There 's one thing, Rose. I 've said it before. That 's all over. I promise you that."

He had turned to look at her, his blue eyes bright with his sincerity, his red mouth under the soft beard tender for her.

Rose gave a little bubbling sigh.

"I don't know." Her voice was almost plaintive.

He said, "If you know, you must tell me. We have time enough, heaven knows. It is different to me, but I can wait. I don't know quite what to think — Henry and the old man."

"Yes."

Henry. . . . Her fingers came away and joined the others in her lap. Bascom was looking at her, she could tell, but she kept her eyes forward. They must not hurry. But the moment was sweet. She felt something in her like a rising wind, but her eyes remained subdued.

"There are so many things. I was n't brought up to expect this. Everything was so much easier than this. I don't know what is best. I only know I 'm in love."

He put out his hands.

"I want you. I think I did the first minute I saw you."

"No. Not till I 'm sure. I don't know what is best. Wait."

Her voice was patient. She knew what was best, but she would not lose the moment. She saw very clearly one thing. She had made herself a place where people moved to her as she liked to have them. She had let Bascom into that place, but if she let him stay like this he might disrupt it.

"I can't think. My heart won't let me," she said.

He kissed her. The tenderness was something new. Henry had always kissed her. This was a caress.

"Darling, darling."

She let herself sink down against him. They sat there a long time in each other's arms. The mares went on crunching up the grass. The hound snapped from time to time at a buck fly. Down by the house the fat old woman looked up from her tomatoes and her paper, and smiled.

"Danged if Ephraim was n't right, the old bezabor," she said to the cat. She hitched round her chair to see better. They sat a long time quite still, one figure. Then they got up, mounted (she smiled to see him help the girl up), and went past down the hill.

"Ephraim was right, but I 'm righter. He never allowed I was right about the mark on the head." She hugged her enormous bosom with her arms and rocked jerkily, nodding her head to the movement. "If I see the girl again I 'll have to tell her."

They paid her no attention, but rode home silent. They took the back road through the meadow.

"Lord!" said Bascom. "They 'll get the roof on this winter yet." The first rafters on the barn were in place, one pair, at the very peak of the south end.

Rose looked. Leo was driving the nail. He stared down at her and dropped his hammer. They heard Pete swearing in an excited voice. "All right, Pete," his puzzled voice said. "I don't know how I come to do it, but the nail 's in."

Pete looked down at them.

"He gets dizzy up high," he explained. "The poor bezabor. I guess it looks like a long way for such a fat man to fall."

Rose said to Bascom, just before they reached the carriage house, "You must n't ask too much."

He whispered, "No. One kiss."

They snatched it at the corner.

He stayed with George, whistling while the groom unsaddled. . . .

"That 's a good tune, Bascom."

Bascom nodded. He followed Rose in. A smile had succeeded the tune. As he passed her door he could hear her talking to Henry. He paused. From what Henry said, he gathered that he had heard from Mr. May.

"It 's too bad. Mr. May says he got there too late and that the position was already filled."

Rose continued brushing her hair. Her lips were smiling faintly. She knew now that she would have no escape, that she and Bascom must find their own solution. Henry was waiting patiently.

"I 'm sorry, Henry."

He looked down uncomfortably.

"I guess I can never get clear of here."

But he said it half-heartedly.

She turned sharply.

"You don't seem very disappointed."

He smiled sheepishly.

"You know, Rose, just before this came I was thinking that perhaps I did n't really want to go. You 've made things different for us here. And when I got the letter I took a long walk. It seems to me there 's a lot to keep one interested here. I have time to read when I want to. And there 's the woods for walking and fishing. . . . I came back by the barn. The rafters, the first pair, are in. I think it 's a beautiful barn, now I can see it."

He broke off. He was sitting on the bed, swinging one foot back and forth, and his eyes were on his shoes.

"Yes, Henry."

His words had tumbled out. He was blushing hard. He looked up.

"Are n't you glad? What 's the matter?"

Her brush had stopped. She was very pale and still. She seemed to have stopped breathing.

Suddenly her breast rose.

"Yes. Of course, I 'm glad."

Bascom slipped on to his room.

On her porch, Mrs. Jones stopped rocking. She waddled inside her house to get supper, the cat rolling along after her on stumpy legs.

"I 'll have to tell that girl my idee about the stone," she said to herself. "Poor old Ephraim. He won't like that."

X

WINTER IN THE VALLEY

1

SEPTEMBER had passed, and October. It was a year for vivid color in the woods. When Rose went riding, the old grass in the pastures had turned a dusty brown; only the meadows kept their summer green, and that too was changed, with a grey tint that looked silver when the wind came. The maples were vermilion and orange, the beeches brown, and the birch and poplar yellow. Against the hills she could pick out the shapes of individual trees. The flavor of the air had changed quickly. One morning in October she woke to see white frost on the lawn, and that morning a north wind began to grow, until by night it was a gale and she listened to the shriek of it in the pines. Along the forest roads, Dainty's hoofs scuffed pastern deep in leaves. And almost as suddenly as they had turned, the leaves vanished from the branches, and trees stood bare.

In the barns, as she passed, she could hear the thrash of flails. Men and women worked in the potato fields, uncovering the hills. Pumpkins gleamed in golden spots among the corn stubs on the hillside lots. It seemed as if the valley were hurrying to close the summer's accounting. Only the evergreen trees along the streams dropped old needles and preserved a balance.

At the edge of the great meadow the barn now stood with all four walls squared to the winds. As the harvesting was done, more men came to work, and the light ring of their hammers was snatched by the wind. She came home one evening to see the wall plates set, the rafters of the second roof in,

and men hoisting up the tiebeams with long ropes. They came up hand over hand from the half-finished wagon run, six men to a beam, and she stopped to watch Leo get down on his knees on the top plate and catch the beam in one hand, while the men leaned on the ropes, and set the end in place. The barn was an empty shape yet, in which the wind discovered voices, but already the grass was growing in toward the foundation.

Dan and the big chestnut team drew earth all day long for the ramp and the cattle run on the lower side, and every day the old man came down from the house, his face red in the cold air, and walked up the ramp. In the evening, when the men had gone home, Rose often found him there at dinner time, moving deliberately in the shadowed emptiness or climbing the inside stairs against the south end. He seemed to have an eye for each new nail.

He would stand beside her for a minute, pointing out the day's progress; then, in the dusk, they would walk silently back across the meadow towards the black pines, and enter the warm house.

The house, more, even, than the land, foreshadowed the winter. Fires spoke in the stoves all day and warmed the hearths, so that even at dawn a hand laid against the chimney bricks would find them warm. The rooms had a peculiar wood smell, which had been absent during the summer.

Parchal had imported a cat, a one-eyed tom, white with yellow spots, who met one suddenly in the halls about once a week, and appeared to spend the rest of his time under the kitchen stove. Parchal was particular in his feeding.

"All he wants to have," Rose heard him lecturing Mrs. Smith, "is a little bit of milk. A kind of a breath of nourishment to keep him active and make him hungry for meat."

Mice had come into the house with the first frost. They came out in the evenings in the dark corners of the rooms and followed paths along the walls, running with neat small steps. One day Rose suggested that they get a younger cat; but Parchal said, "No, ma'am. I 've had that cat eight year and he 's a dinger after mice. You 've got no idea the good he does. Why, that cat sleeps with one eye open!"

"But there are more mice than ever, Parchal."

He looked at her fully. Then his face brightened.

"If there are," he said, "It 's because he forgets which one is his blind eye. . . ."

Henry and Bascom were up on the Moose River property blazing boundary lines with the county surveyor. They had been gone two weeks. Since his decision to remain on the farm, Henry had been more active, less inclined towards his books and the people at Sheriffville. He had worked for a while at the barn, sporadically, for he had no idea of the order of building, and the old man had grunted, "Just a notion of his — it won't last." Henry seemed to Rose more boyish. He came to her at night with tales of his day's work. For the moment his imagination was caught by the fact of his "taking hold," as he liked to call it. He mentioned feats of the men with the heavy timbers. Oddly enough, he caught none of the humor of their remarks or actions, and it was Rose who, thinking of Leo and Pete, would smile in the candlelight as she let down her hair, while he sat on the edge of the bed, swinging his bare feet back and forth. His hair always looked mussed at bedtime, and as often as not it was he himself who made her smile.

All the people round her were dear to her now. Her work came more easily in consequence; she did it naturally, as one long used to her duties; and in the family she had an accepted place, as one of themselves. Only Mrs. Brinley kept aloof. The former housekeeper still ate her meals in her room and took walks alone. She slipped in and out so inconspicuously that, except for the trays that went up to her, one would scarcely have guessed her existence. To Rose she stood as the last of an old order, the last barrier for her to overcome. The woman nettled her. She politely froze Rose's approaches, and after a third attempt Rose gave up. The old man noticed it, and suggested, "Fire her out. She 's nothing to any of us. I 'll put money in the bank for her." But the woman enjoyed a martyr's spirit, and as long as she wanted to stay Rose could not allow her to be sent forth.

She was glad that Henry and Bascom were away. With

Bascom in the house and the knowledge in his eyes when they met hers, she was uneasy. He threatened her sense of establishment; and yet she cherished the presence of the threat. At the first sweep that followed their mutual acknowledgment, her inclination had been to let things drop and let him carry her away. Her common sense had told her to wait. Now she understood that she would have to settle her heart in this place. Perhaps from contact with the old man, perhaps from some fibre in her own nature, she had acquired the sense of possession; but where his took form in physical properties, hers lay in her influence over the people surrounding her. Bascom roused illogical passion.

She sat before his bureau now sorting his linen into its proper drawers. In the handling of it she allowed herself a physical luxury. A feeling of intimacy thrilled her at the touch, and her fingers lingered sensitively upon it like a bride's. Her eyelids drooped, the dark lashes showing their full length, and her lips, slightly parted, seemed fuller.

Ralph saw her there as he went by on his way down to dinner. He came into the room and stood behind her.

"It 's dinner time," he said after a moment.

"Yes," she said, drawing her breath in. "I must hurry."

She closed the drawers sharply, rose, and returned the chair to its corner.

"I expect the boys will be back to-night. To-day's Monday. Election day to-morrow. Henry 's not going to miss casting a vote!"

"No."

"He 's not so keen as he was, in some ways."

He grumbled to himself. "This election's going to mean trouble."

"Here?"

"No. I don't mean that."

He waited for her to precede him. In the hall he took her arm. They started down the stairs together.

"I 'm going to be sorry, in a way, with the boys back. It 's been nice to have you all to myself."

She gave him a smile. It was unusual, a compliment. But

his dark eyes were serious. She felt that he wanted to say something. From the moment he had entered Bascom's room she had been uneasy, conscious of a certain degree of self-betrayal.

He said, all at once, on the landing, "I saw Driscoll's baby yesterday."

"Dr. Jerry said it was a big boy."

"Yes." He stepped forward again, as if he had said enough. Then as they waited for Joan in the hall, he said, "Is n't it about time you gave us a boy, too?"

Rose felt her color rising. Then it ebbed.

"No."

It was a denial to assure herself. Ralph glanced at her. His grey eyes looked black. He said seriously in a low voice, "That 's what marriage is for."

He had not meant anything, she saw.

"The rafters are almost all in place. Six pair still on the north end." He seemed to be talking to himself. He touched her arm. "The place wants an heir."

Joan came down; they went in to dinner: three partridges; blackberry jelly. The old man ate moodily. . . .

Henry and Bascom came in at midnight, while the house slept. Rose woke in bed at the touch of his cheek against hers. It was rough with a two weeks' beard. He was sleeping. Bascom would be upstairs in his room. She remembered the old man's words: "The place wants an heir." She wondered when her child would come. It was her obvious duty — part of her position here, and she recognized it. It was good to have the boys back. . . .

Bascom found her in the deer park after breakfast — a cloudy northwest sky, and the pines tossing their branches high above. They stood quite still, his body sheltering her from the snatch of the wind.

She looked up into his face for an instant and read his impatient blue eyes. He was not used to waiting. And her heart cried, "Wait."

She turned her head and met the eyes of the old buck, Greg, in the ravine below the bridge. His blue coat shone

with a grey light. He was standing quite motionless in the shadow of a hemlock. Bascom, following her gaze, saw him and laughed.

"Afraid of a deer?"

His arms tightened.

"No, no, Bascom."

She felt his arms close about her. In her ears the sough of the pines was deafening.

She said suddenly: "Your father's been to see Driscoll's boy."

His arms for an instant went slack, and in a breath she had come to life and slipped free. She walked rapidly to the end of the bridge. Her heart was pounding. "The place wants an heir."

"I must go in now," she said. "I 've got my work to do."

He said nothing walking beside her, his face flushed. At the door, Ralph called to him, "Come on, Bascom. We 're going in to town."

He sat in the coach holding the reins of the bay team, his hat brim curling in the wind and his brown driving coat buttoned about his throat. Henry sat beside him. Inside, Rose caught a glimpse of Dan and George, and Parchal's stale eyes. They were in their Sunday clothes. Going to vote.

Bascom got in without a word, and the horses turned the corner briskly. Rose watched them away. Pete and Leo, coming to work after voting themselves, stopped below her, said, "Good morning."

"A solid Republican coach," Pete said. "The whole town 's voting for him."

Leo looked up. "I did n't."

Pete snorted.

"He 's the only Demycrat so far. And why do you think? I told the poor bezabor to mark in the right-hand column and danged if he did n't mark in the left! He never could tell the difference!"

Leo looked down at his fists.

"It was handier, that way," he said.

They went on. Rose stood looking after the wagon. There

had been more excitement than usual in the valley; it had come suddenly. A high vote was expected.

Mrs. Smith said at her shoulder, "Will we have that roast to-day? It would be good with the corn pudding. And it won't keep much longer."

Rose went in.

2

Rose was up in the attic getting out the winter bedding, Joan helping her.

"Which are your father's, Joan?"

"Those brown ones."

"I never saw such heavy blankets! Just feel them!"

Joan gathered up a corner in her brown fist.

"You 'll need them, Rose. It gets cold here."

"It 's cold this morning."

"Oh, this is nothing. Wait till we have a blizzard. That 's exciting. And the real cold comes just after one!"

The two girls were on their knees before the great cedar chest. It had carved edges to the lid, and a great wrought-iron lock was fitted into the side. Rose had opened it with a key that might have opened the gate of a walled town. The warmth of the downstairs fires had come up through the trapdoor, making the attic comfortable, if one wore a jacket, and both girls had jackets over their wool dresses.

From the rafters hung snowshoes on wires, so that the squirrels and mice could not get at the webs.

"Squirrels come in in the fall — not red ones, but flying ones. Did you ever see one, Rose? They 're soft and grey. Parchal's cat brought one down last winter."

Trunks, with heavy leather straps, had their places round the walls. Great stacks of periodicals stood at the far end. A couple of old beds with cord springs, a spinning wheel standing over a pile of distaffs, an ice saw, queer odds and ends, made a musty smell; but when Rose lifted the lid of the chest, the cedar perfume flooded the dusky air.

Outside, a west wind was lifting the pine boughs. Their

sighing, all about the roof, gave the girls a sensation of being high up, and imparted an unexplainable feeling of movement to the attic, as if it were a ship. Now and then a branch touched the roof, and drew over the shingles with a scrape of its needles.

"Those are mine," Joan said, lifting out two pairs of yellow blankets. "I don't know where the others go. Bascom's are the red ones."

Rose held them in her arms.

"Maybe you 'd better get Mrs. Brinley. She 'd know where they all belong. Here, Joan, take your blankets as you go down."

Joan started through the trap. As her head reached the level of the floor, she stopped.

"Hear the wind!"

A higher note was creeping into the wind's voice.

"Nance said this morning there would be snow."

She went down. Rose stayed by the chest, on her knees, holding Bascom's blankets in her arms. It was three weeks past election, and he had been keeping away from her. She felt his impatience; the occasional glances he had given her seemed almost contemptuous.

"What can I do?" she said to herself. "Dear Bascom, don't you see? It 's as hard for me."

Every week she wrote home, and her mother said of her letters, "Rose sounds so happy." And she was; and she was not. Bascom could make it so easy for her if he wanted. But he wanted more than she had any right to give him, though she wanted, too. She might give it, if it were not for a streak of practical hard sense that said, "Is it worth while?"

She felt, also, that three people watched her. Nance, because she loved Bascom; Joan, because she had seen already; and Mrs. Brinley, because she waited her chance.

She gave the blankets a last squeeze and laid them down just as the former housekeeper's head appeared in the trap.

"Yes," she said.

"I 'm sorry to bother you, Mrs. Brinley, but I thought you would know where the bedding should go."

"It should all be aired," Mrs. Brinley said. "Those are Bascom's you 've just set down; those, Mr. Wilder's; those yours and Henry's. These are mine and these go to the servants."

She named them all with an edge of condescension in her voice.

"I 'm going for a walk." She went back to the trap.

"You 'll be cold," Rose said.

"Yes. It 's begun to snow."

"Oh," said Rose.

"Bascom likes the thin pair on top," Mrs. Brinley said over her shoulder. "He 's particular about his bed. But probably you know, anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"You probably do. You do everything so well."

"Mrs. Brinley — "

The woman paused.

"Why do you dislike me so?"

The woman's eyebrows raised and she buttoned the collar of her jacket.

"Why? I don't dislike you. I 'm sorry for you."

She went down.

Later, when Rose had finished hanging the bedding before the upstairs fireplaces, she opened the door on to the verandah to see what the weather was doing. The wind drove snow in her face so sharply that for a moment she was afraid to open her eyes, and the door was almost taken from her hand. On the level of the ground, the noise of the pines that she had heard so plainly in the attic was inaudible. The snow came in small flakes, whirling, covering the lawns, blotting out the shapes of the trees, and completely enclosing the house. When Rose closed the door behind her she had an odd feeling that the snow was trying to come between her and the house, and her hand retained its grip on the doorknob.

The chestnut farm team appeared suddenly out of the snowfall — the horses powdered, the sleigh piled high with wood. Dan, driving, in an old brown leather coat and a brown cap with ear muffles up, saw her standing with her

back against the door and a few flakes caught in her dark hair.

"Good morning ma'am."

His voice had a cheerful ring, and for a moment the snow became a pleasant thing, with a power for intimacy. Against the pattern of its driven flakes, his face and hands shone bright red. He gave her a smile, and Rose smiled back.

"Good morning, Dan. Where are you getting the wood from?"

"The back-pasture lot. We cut it last fall. It 's mostly beech and I 've mixed in some elm."

"Is this going to be a heavy snow?"

He twisted his head to face the wind.

"A man can hardly tell. I think so. It 's mounting up in the woods. I can't see the road at all."

A shiver caught her, partly from the wind's bite.

"You have n't seen Mrs. Brinley, have you?"

"No. Did she go out?"

Rose nodded.

"It 's easy to get lost a day like this, if you are n't accustomed to the snow."

He looked sober, shaking his head. "My, he 's handsome," Rose thought.

He spoke to the team and they went on round the house, their hoofs making no sound in the snow. Only the back runners of the bobs squeaked as the sleigh turned.

Rose went in. The warmth of the hall fire struck her, making her cheeks burn.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Smith was making a venison pie. She unbent herself before the oven and got to her feet. Her face had a shining redness from the warmth.

"Have you seen Mrs. Brinley?"

"No, ma'am."

"She went out for a walk two hours ago."

Mrs. Smith looked at her quietly. In the stillness they heard the purring of Parchal's old cat. The snow meant nothing to him.

"That 's bad, ma'am."

"Where are Mr. Henry and Bascom?"

"Down in the barn."

Rose went to the old man's office and asked her question of Ralph. He looked up from the paper he was reading, and the smile he had for her left him. With the cold coming on he had been bothered with rheumatism, and he spent a great part of his time before a roaring fire. The office had a faint smell of fleece from his sheepskin slippers.

"That fool woman. We ought to have fired her."

Rose said, "It 's too bad. I told her not to go."

"She'll get lost," he growled. "Serve her right!" But he looked worried.

"I 'll run out and ask George."

"Take a coat."

"Is this snow going to be bad, Father?"

He looked out of the window. "It 's hard to say. I should think it would fall two feet."

She went out to the barn. The snow was already deeper than her ankles.

She swung the doors open ahead of her and slipped in. George sat before his small stove in the harness room, soaping the saddles. The light from the draughts threw a red glow on his dark face and with his hunched shoulder made him look diabolic. He delivered a quid and wiped his lips and got up.

"No, ma'am, I have n't seen that woman. She never bothered me here in the old days, she don't now. Would you like to see Dainty?"

"Yes."

He put the saddle down.

"Won't be much chance to ride from now on. She misses you."

Rose said guiltily, "I forgot to bring sugar."

"I 've got some."

He brought her some in a stained palm. They entered the stable. It smelled clean of straw, with a faint whiff of ammonia. The horses nickered. He held open the door of Dainty's stall and the mare swung round toward Rose, her

small ears pricked, her eyes shining faintly. She mumbled the sugar daintily out of Rose's hand.

"She 's sweet," George said.

"Yes."

"You ought to come and see her oftener. She 's lonesome."

He slapped the mare's belly under her blankets and she kicked playfully. "She needs a good run."

Rose said, "The stable looks beautiful."

He touched his hat, grinning.

Coming back to the house, she met old Nance striding along, bareheaded, her flannel petticoat swinging over the snow. At Rose's greeting, her mahogany eyes swept round. She had a man's overcoat on her shoulders, the arms dangling. In her hands she carried a basket with the table butter wrapped in a clean napkin.

"Yes, I seen her. She was going up along the swamp trail, with her nose as high as a turkey's tail."

"It 's a bad day for her to be out, Nance."

"Do her good to get scared."

Both stood without speaking.

Then Rose said, "Is it going to snow more?"

Nance swung her petticoat restlessly from side to side.

"Snow? Yeanh. It 'll be a heavy fall. It 's a snow year. I 'll tell you how much we 'll have all winter if you ask me Christmas night."

"Where 's Bascom?"

"With Henry."

The old woman's eyes lifted to Rose's.

"They're in the barn."

They started walking back to the house together.

"How will you know about the snowfall?" Rose asked.

"I can tell," Nance said. "I can tell a lot of things. Bascom shows and you ain't sly enough. Look out for yourselves. So long as you don't hurt him I don't care, and I won't tell. But if Henry finds out, it 's going to be bad. Henry can get mad."

"It 's not true!" Rose exclaimed.

But with a fine indifference the old woman had swung up

the kitchen steps. Rose entered the front hall. The boys had come in and stood together warming their hands before the fireplace. Bascom was laughing.

"Pete 's been mad all morning. Leo started it. He was up on a beam measuring a board for a grain shoot. He 'd forgotten his measure, and he could n't saw up there anyway. We were watching him. He monkeyed with his hammer and saw a while, then he said, 'You cut it off, Pete. It 's two saws and that much on the hammer,' and he threw them down, and cut himself a chew while Pete was trying to find out how much it was on the hammer. Pete had to go up the ladder after him to find out."

Ralph came out of his office and grinned.

Rose said, on top of her laugh, "Nance saw Mrs. Brinley going up the swamp trail."

They were sobered.

"Has n't she come in, Parchal?" Ralph asked.

The butler gave a puzzled stare.

"Mrs. Brinley," Ralph said.

"Oh." Parchal dropped his eyes. "No."

"Lunch 's ready."

"We 'd better eat."

Joan joined them and they went in. . . .

The snow filled the corners of the window sashes; the wind died; but the flakes came heavier. By tea time, Rose began to feel indignant. Ralph was grumbling, "She might have done it on purpose to get us scared."

"She 's lost all right," Rose said. "It 's getting awfully cold. She would n't stay out so long if she was n't lost."

Henry, Bascom, and Dan had gone out with lanterns. Though it was only half-past four, the day was merging with night, and in the woods the earth seemed shut in upon itself. Rose had gone out along the trail for a way with them, holding Juno by a leash. "She won't let you get lost," Bascom said. She had heard their voices on each side of her calling, but the sound was muffled by the snow that clung to the balsam branches. There was no smell in the woods now — just the dim light, and the taste of the cold air. Once, in a clear-

ing, Rose saw Dan, hands cupped to his mouth, shouting; but she barely heard his voice. It seemed hopeless.

She returned after an hour of it.

Now, having a glass of port with the old man, her anxiety irritated her. She half favored his theory that the woman had stayed out on purpose to scare them. And then, as she set down her glass, she heard them on the verandah. A wave of cold reached her, and she had a sudden chilled feeling in her stomach.

"Easy, Henry," she heard Bascom saying. "Let Dan take her."

With Ralph at her heels, she hurried into the hall.

Dan held Mrs. Brinley in his arms. Her head hung back, her eyes were closed. The skin on her cheeks had lost what little color it had, but a faint blue underlay it, and a hand which had come out of the muff was purplish.

Rose's indignation melted into pity.

"Take her up to her room," she said to Dan. "There 's a good fire there. Put her on the bed."

She ran for Mrs. Smith. Over her shoulder she heard Ralph saying, "I 'll get some whiskey."

Mrs. Smith knew what to do. She had Lucy heat a pair of blankets before the hall fire, and told her to bring them up when they were warmed through. She and Rose went up to the former housekeeper's room.

"We 'll have to take her clothes off."

Then they chafed her thoroughly, working away from the heart. Mrs. Smith forced down two spoonfuls of whiskey through the narrow jaws. When the blankets came, they wrapped her in them, and laid her in the bed with heated soapstone. They were rewarded at last with a slight return of color.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Smith sent Rose to bed. "Lucy and I 'll take turns, and you can come in and take my place at six."

Rose took a last look at the face, still and pale in the candlelight, and she was overwhelmed with feelings of mixed friendliness and shame. Mrs. Smith sat down in a bedside chair to watch. Mrs. Brinley had not said a word. After

she was in bed, Rose lay listening to the flakes against the panes.

At six o'clock, when she went in to relieve Lucy, the dawn was pale outside the window. She stood looking forth, taking in her first impression of the northland winter. The pine boughs were motionless under their freight of new snow. Frost made the bare branches of the maples thin and grey. Against the white light in the east, balsams raised pointed black spears. There was no undertone of life like the whisper on quiet mornings in summer. The lack of leaves had taken one dimension from the woods, and in the clear air, for an instant, Rose felt that she was looking out upon a tiny scene cut from strips of paper. It was sad.

Then she heard a sound behind her, which her senses were not able immediately to identify, and for a few breaths she had an unwillingness to turn back to the room. It was such a small sound in the sleeping house, yet so measured with effort that Rose was afraid.

When she did turn, Rose found the woman's eyes on hers, and the sound was her breathing. Rose went to the bedside.

"How are you? Warmer?"

The eyes seemed to say, "Yes." But the lips remained drawn in their tight line. Rose said, "I 'm so sorry." There was so little she could find to say. Again the eyes gave her some message, but this time she could not understand. "I 've sent for Dr. Jerry. He 'll be over soon. You 've had a bad chill." The eyes were staring straight at the ceiling. "You must try to get well," Rose went on. Her sense of pity was as strong in her as on the evening before. She wished that she could find a relief for her own heart. She said: "We must start getting ready for Christmas. You must help me and Joan."

The eyes closed, and Rose thought the woman had not heard. Then she noticed a drop at the corner of each eye. They squeezed out and moved slowly away from the thin nose down the cheeks. . . .

At breakfast, Henry said, "We found her under a hemlock within sixty feet of the deer-park fence."

"She looked like a scared rabbit," Bascom said. "We 'd have missed her if it had n't been for Juno.". . .

Dr. Jerry said, after he had examined her: "She 's got pneumonia. She 'll have a bad time."

Rose nursed her, and Joan took her turn.

"Poor Mrs. Brinley," she said, her grey eyes sad, "her poor thin hands."

She was as useful as a man in the sick room, lifting the inert body. The hands the governess had called clumsy managed her weight tenderly.

Mrs. Brinley did not die. By the second Sunday in December, Dr. Jerry pronounced her out of danger. But she had changed. The sudden discovery of Rose's pity had taken her last foothold from her. She was patient and uncomplaining, and her old determination showed only in her effort to get well.

On the twenty-second, she had a talk with Ralph in the office. He told Rose afterward: "She wants to go. I made her take a thousand dollars. She's been faithful in her way. She did n't want to take it. Said she had money saved, and I don't doubt it. But I 'll feel easier. My wife got her here."

On Christmas Eve she said good-bye, shaking hands with them all, dignified and neat, and stepped out quickly to the cutter in which George waited to drive her down to Boonville.

The family stood together in a group before the fireplace in the hall — Bascom smiling quietly, Joan looking upset, Henry ill at ease. The old man leaned on his stick and stared out of the door, his grey eyes dark and troubled. From the kitchen they heard low voices of the servants chattering. The door closed; it was still for an instant. Beyond the windows the sky was grey, with snow hidden in it. The sound of the sleighbells died away.

At a slight sound on the stairs, they all turned. Parchal's ancient, one-eyed cat was coming down, carrying a tiny mouse! Unheeding, tail up, neck proudly arched, he marched past them toward the kitchen.

"Christmas Eve!" Rose said suddenly. "We must have a tree." They all looked at her.

She stood with her back to the flames, slender and graceful in her brown wool dress. Her chin was up, a bright color on her cheeks, and for some reason she looked taller.

3

Ralph said, "I marked a balsam in the corner of the north pasture last month."

He described its position exactly and Bascom recognized the spot.

"We 'll get it after lunch."

"Fine," said Rose. "I 've got to see Mrs. Smith now for a while. Joan." She whispered to Joan directions about the presents and the decorations for the tree. Joan nodded vigorously, her eyes shining.

Henry said, "We 'll need greens, too."

"I like those crawling cedar vines," said Ralph.

"Yes. I know where there 's a big bunch."

Their spirits rose suddenly. The doors of the big hall began opening and closing behind them as they went out, letting in cold breaths of air that made the flames dance on the hearth. The sounds of footfalls hurrying back and forth upstairs came down like whispers, with a sense of secrecy. Only Parchal, in the pantry, dozing over the silver, and his cat digesting the small mouse under the stove, were unaffected.

By lunch time, the hall and the dining room had taken on the aspect of a forest. Boughs of pine stood in great copper and brass bowls in the corners, creeping cedar hung from the antlers and made a frame for the silver Wilder shield, dried bittersweet berries made bright orange patches here and there, and all together gave a sweet smell throughout the house, as if the warmth had waked them.

In the afternoon, Rose and Joan and Bascom and Henry put on snowshoes and went out and found the tree. Rose's legs ached with the unaccustomed strain, but her face shone pink, and her laughter over her own clumsiness went with them. A carefree spirit possessed all of them, even Henry, who

joined Bascom in pelting the girls with snowballs, a game at which Joan could hold her part with any man.

Bascom cut the tree with three clean strokes, and at each touch of the axe the snow sprayed from its needles until, when he lifted it to his shoulder, it looked black and clean.

When they came out on the flatland again, the night was closing in, and a few flakes were drifting aimlessly through the dark air. The barn raised its great bulk upon the snow, dark, silent, empty. There was no sound of work inside the walls to give it life; but the party with the tree passed close to it, and Bascom's laugh, entering a door, echoed among the new beams when they had gone.

The lights from the farmhouse windows stretched over the snow to make shadows in the trail of their snowshoes. Icicles from the porch eaves caught sparkles of the light and gleamed like gold. Beyond them they had a glimpse of Nance, moving back and forth in a red dress.

They entered the hall in a gust of air and snowflakes, to find old Ralph and Dan before the fireplace.

Ralph turned to them, red-faced from the heat, a grin on his wide mouth.

"Dan 's just brought in the Christmas log."

Dan stood aside for them to see it.

"Elm," he said; "five years cured."

The log stood on end, four feet in length and nearly two feet through. They stood round Dan while he bent down and laid it on, his coat drawn tight across his shoulders by the weight. It settled down with a crunch on the bed of coals, and in a minute small flames started creeping round it, licked up, and caught the bark. It burned evenly from end to end, without making a spark, with complete peacefulness.

They placed the tree against the wall opposite the fire, hanging on the branches strings of red thorn berries, sprays of bittersweet, long ears of corn, golden or maroon or white — a tree dressed as it should be dressed. The frost came out of the branches as they worked, and the perfume moved steadily across the hall to the chimney.

It grew steadily colder. Frost marked the dining-room win-

dows as they ate supper — the kitchen was too occupied with the dinner for the next day to produce more food. But old Ralph brought up a bottle of Madeira.

"Your grandfather sent it around the Horn in one of the Sheriff ships."

The fat round bottle, stamped with a monogrammed "B. W.," had a traveled air as it stood on the sideboard, and it offered a taste of heaven. Rose could see Parchal's nose lift and his nostrils spread whenever he filled a glass. He carried it in his hand, held before him carefully, with reverence.

After supper, they sat together in the hall, the three men by the fireplace, Ralph smoking a cigar with Bascom, Henry staring into the fire, while the girls brought down the presents and placed them at the foot of the tree behind the wall of apples.

At eight o'clock the servants came in, Mrs. Smith in the lead, her portly front surrounded with black; behind her, Lucy, smiling and bashful; then Parchal, looking dazed; George in a new coat that fitted his crooked shoulder; and Dan, silent, his green eyes friendly. With Rose seated beside him, Ralph greeted them heartily.

"Merry Christmas. There are your presents," he pointed with his stick. There was an envelope from him for each one of them, and smaller presents — articles of clothing, pipes for the men, lace and dainties for the women — from the others.

"My, what a dandy tree!" said Mrs. Smith, beaming. As always, a buttery smell clung to her. "It don't seem right to touch a thing." But she took her presents first, to preserve her dignity.

As she stood back close to the family, watching the others, Ralph asked, "Where 's Nance?"

"That girl is always late. I would n't wait for her any more."

Mrs. Smith looked indignant. The old man growled and grinned. With their presents in their hands, the servants stood a moment in an awkward hush.

Mrs. Smith drew herself up.

"It 's like Christmas in the old days again, just family!"

She beamed round. She seemed to have struck just the right tone for an allusion to Mrs. Brinley. "We are all very happy to have a new lady for the house, and we are all real grateful for these here presents."

Her face had become redder and she had rattled off the last words with a rush.

Ralph laughed, tilting his white head back.

"Go on to bed," he said. "And go without your breakfasts."

"Thank you," they all said, and "Yeanh," and "Good night."

When Mrs. Smith had backed into the kitchen after a muttered demand to Parchal to bow, the old man said, "Now you 'd better see what you have. Nance will be in soon. She always does this. I guess she likes to come in with the family."

From the tree, Rose looked over her shoulder at him. He sat straight in the chair, the smile still on his lips. She had never seen him looking so happy, and, if he had not been wearing the big sheepskin slippers, so young.

This family took Christmas seriously. A quiet pleasure suffused them, absorbing all their interests, and she had a glimpse of the strength of family feeling behind the old man's generation that had brought them to their present strength. She could see a paler reflection of the same feeling in Henry, — it had come with the winter, — and it was written all over Joan's homely face. She, of the three, was really closest to her father. Only Bascom looked careless of it. He met Rose's glance with an assurance in his smile that she resented, though she felt her own lips answering him.

In this position, Nance found them. She came in through the front door, her man's coat powdered with snow, but when she took it off, Rose started. Her hair was done tidily, her cheeks were bright with the cold, her dark eyes gleamed warmly in the candlelight. She wore a dark brownish-red dress, almost matching the vivid brown of her eyes, and the neat shoes on her feet, and the glimpse of smooth stocking, made her seem young.

"Hello, Nance," Ralph said. "You 're late."

She did not answer, beyond smiling, and Ralph got to his

feet. They came over to the tree side by side; and Rose thought, "She 's handsome."

She said "Hello" to them all, her voice full and deep, and made a curtsey, way to the floor, as sweetly as a girl. Rose had a feeling that the family was complete.

The papers rustled as they undid the parcels, exclaimed at what they found, and exchanged kisses. And when they were done, they made a circle round the hearth.

"Are n't you going to tell fortunes, the way you always do?" Bascom asked.

Nance said, "Where are the cards?"

He got her the cards and a table.

"Joan."

Nance had seated herself and took command.

Her air of play left her as her thin fingers took the cards. Trembling in her excitement, Joan sat down opposite. "Cut them," said Nance. "Two packs."

She took the first and ran through them. "These are what has happened. There 's no use telling them." She put them aside. "Here 's the future." She began dealing the cards face up, bending over them, her lips silently making phrases. Suddenly her eyes closed.

"What is it?" Joan asked in her deep voice.

A noticeable shiver passed up Nance's back.

"The whole family 's in this pack. I can't make it out clear at all. It 's queer." There was conviction of truth in her voice. "Joan 's going to do something soon." She swept the cards together. "Bascom — cut." He laughed as he reached over Joan's shoulder and made two packs. Nance looked at the bottom card of the first, and paled. Rose had a glimpse of the ace of spades. The old woman turned up the top card of the under pack. A jack of clubs. "Look out for a little dark man. Oh, Bascom!" The next card was the king of clubs. "And a big one."

Rose glanced at Ralph. He was staring at Nance, breathing steadily but hard.

Bascom laughed. "It 's nonsense," he said, teasingly; but the old woman rose suddenly. "Yeanh."

She stood looking down at her hand which held the cards, hopelessly mixed together.

"It 's not for Christmas, maybe."

"Nonsense," Bascom said again. "You always have. Tell Rose's."

Rose felt a shiver in her, but she said, "Yes."

After a minute's hesitation, Nance nodded. She glanced at the cards. "You 've been in love and you 've not known it. You 're going to live a long time."

She paused.

"Is she going to have children?" It was Ralph who asked.

"One."

"Girl or boy?"

"I could n't tell."

She bent to the cards again, but Ralph leaned back, with something like a sigh.

Rose asked, "Am I going to travel?"

"No. You 're going to stay here. Yeanh, all your life. You and Henry."

Rose bent toward the cards.

"What else is there, Nance?"

The old woman had a card in her hand as she got to her feet. "Nothing." She said it determinedly. Rose felt a slight dizziness as she looked at her face. It was hard and bitter, and the brown eyes appeared misty.

"Good night," said Nance.

She went quickly out into the snow.

Henry glanced at Rose, his eyes smiling.

"Bedtime," said Ralph. He came over and kissed Rose and Henry and went with them to their room. "Good night."

Joan and Bascom stood together by the tree. They, too, said good-night, but Bascom's face was sad. . . .

The clock on the stairs struck eleven in the still hall. Rose, who had lain awake, slipped out of bed.

The candles had been blown out; the only light came from the big log on the irons. Beside it Ralph sat in his chair, his head bent forward on his chest. Rose watched him a moment, then picked up the cards on the table. She sorted them

quietly, holding them toward the fire, until she could tell the missing cards; and she found that two were gone — the ace of spades and the king of diamonds. She remembered Nance's face and the words "Oh, Bascom!" It was the second time the ace of spades had been drawn. Bascom had it the first time, she the second; and in her pack it had come with the king of diamonds. A fair, tall man — "Bascom," she whispered.

The old man stirred. He looked disheveled, like the papers about the foot of the tree. He was saying something in his sleep. She bent over him, her nightgown touching his knees. "— or boy?" She lightly kissed the top of his head, and stole back to her room.

The clock struck twelve and a little later she heard the creak of the stair treads under his weight. She lay still, wondering: Henry and she all her life, here. And Bascom had said, "Nonsense."

XI

THE RIVER BREAKS

At five o' clock in the afternoon of March 6, Uncle George was sitting in the back part of Mercer's store, looking out of the window at the river bed.

There had been three hot days in a row, now, but the snow still covered the valley. Only along the edges of the swamps it looked grey; and the white legs of Mercer's hound, come in from an afternoon of idle hunting, were stained black from the fallen pitch. The old man sat by himself, hands on his knees, his thick white beard outthrust and his old eyes peering rheumily. The only light, in the front store, under which Mercer leaned with his paper in his hands, barely touched Uncle George's cheeks.

"It 's been a heavy winter, Mercer. Five foot of snow on the level all winter long."

Mercer looked up from his paper, his round face serious, and peered over his spectacles. The old man's ideas wandered more every day; just a minute ago he had been all stirred up by the inauguration proceedings, and here he was talking about the snow. But Mercer said kindly, "Yes, Uncle George, that 's right. Five foot. And just what that Nance of Wilder's said there 'd be. She 's a witch."

"Witch!" The old man snorted. "If you was as old as I be, you would n't say witch. Any man with sense could have told you. Did n't I?"

"Yeanh. That 's right."

"Well, all I done was measure the longest icicle on my kitchen porch at midnight Christmas Eve. When you 've see more of the world, you 'll find things come easier."

The old man leaned back and closed his eyes.

"If you said a *b* instead of a *w* on that word, now, you 'd be all right."

Mercer gave a sort of cackle and returned to his paper. Out of the corner of his eye, Uncle George was watching him. It was quite still in the store. There was no sound of running water; even the falls had been frozen fast. In the sunset they could be seen, curtain after curtain of tremendous icicles.

Just the two of them, an old man and a storekeeper, reading the paper of the day before. The mail had come in later in the afternoon — with a sound of bells all the way down the long hill. Just the bells — no stamp of horses; and the mail driver, coat open, had carried in the bag, and put it down, and cursed the wet snow that made him late, and gone out, and they had heard the bells again climbing all the way back up the long hills. Uncle George had heard them, for he was thinking to himself — but the storekeeper had been sorting the mail. Now, of all men in the valley, they were privileged to read the news.

Mercer had read items aloud to please the old man, who had sat back, hands placed carefully, like an oracle of ancient wisdom. He said now: "You 're thinking, 'Uncle George is getting old and doddery in his head — talking about snow like that.' But it ain't so, boy. We 've had three hot days, and it 's March, and the falls still froze. Boy, there 's going to be an almighty big burst of something in a little while. That 's what Uncle George was thinking."

Mercer glanced up over his glasses again, a certain respect on his plump features.

"That 's the truth. I had n't thought about it like that."

Uncle George folded his hands on his thin middle.

"Read me that agin out of this man Lincoln's talk."

Mercer pushed his glasses back into place, rustled the paper, cleared his throat, and read it word by word; and Uncle George in a higher voice, swinging his beard to the syllables, repeated after him: "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war."

The two looked at each other when they had done. After a minute, Uncle George said, "*Momentous* — Mercer, a word like that costs dollars."

"Momentous," he said to himself again, "momentous."

He caught himself in a nod, sat up suddenly, and listened. There was a faint echo of a cracking report, like a rifle's.

"The falls!" he exclaimed. "They 're loosening, Mercer." He leaned toward the window. A dark spot showed in the ice under the falls, and through it he could see great bubbles pressing the thin surface.

He watched them going by, disappearing, until he had lost count; they slipped away from under like the very many years he had lived; and each bubble seemed to bring him a new memory. He again began to nod. . . .

Half an hour later, a cutter came up to the door with a splash of bell music, and Bascom got out, leaving the reins in Rose's hands. The grey mare lifted her hoofs nervously one after another and snuffed up deep breaths. On the board sidewalk, in a spot the sun had cleared of snow, the bitch lay down; but she, too, kept drawing in her lolling tongue with a wet slither over her teeth to taste the air. Bundled in her fur coat and robe, Rose watched them. She had been uneasy all day, and late in the afternoon had consented to go with Bascom to exercise Belle. She had wanted a breath of air, and she had got it; for the grey mare had traveled at a pace that kept the hound stretching out to hold her own, through Sheriffville and round by Speakersville, and home again to the High Falls for the mail. The snow lay heavy and dead and grey on the meadows; and when they passed spots where the sun had made it soft, Rose smelled a faint sourness, as if the wet earth were pushing through. Throughout the drive, the smell had haunted her with familiarity, until, coming back into the valley, she had recognized it. There had been the same smell on the air almost a year ago.

Bascom came out with the storekeeper at his heels. Mr. Mercer nodded to Rose and gave her good-evening. He put a thumb over his shoulder.

"Uncle George is sleeping. He got all stirred up over the paper. Regular roused up and talking like a pelican. He 's asleep now and he 'd ought to rest a spell." He pushed the spectacles back into place, folded his arms on the arm of the cutter seat, and nibbled a quill toothpick. "That looks bad," he went on with a nod at the paper. "We 'll have war, maybe. I wonder what your Pa will think about it. He 'd know better 'n us. Uncle George says there 's only war can come out of it."

"I have n't kept close track of it," Bascom said. "It looks likely. But it ought n't to last long. We ought to whip them pretty easy."

Mercer shook his head.

"Yeanh, maybe."

"But they won't fight."

"My Gol, they 'll have to if they stick to this Secession business. The whole blamed outfit down there has joined in. Lincoln talks like business."

"Well, the old man will want the paper. We 'd better be going on."

The mare went off like a shot. But at the bridge she dropped back to a walk, and went over with dainty feet.

"Listen to the river, Rose. It sounds like breaking."

The sun had gone down behind Tug Hill, and the river ice below the falls, where the eddies of wind had kept it clean, gleamed like black marble.

"Bascom?" Rose had heard the river. It had found a weak spot and made an air hole, and the running water gulped in air with a sobbing breath. It stirred her and made her afraid. "Bascom, if there 's war, will you go?"

He turned to her. Her small face kept pointed straight ahead, her curved lips were tight pressed, almost straight. She looked calm.

All winter she had held him off. At first he had been angry, for she had admitted that she loved him; then he had been puzzled. She had met him again and again to give him kisses, and that was all. Why she had held off he could not tell;

it was n't Pearl — they had threshed that out before. But he saw now that she was stirred.

"Naturally, Henry will go in a minute; and for all his talk about slaves (Grandfather had them when he was a boy) the old man is dead behind Lincoln. You 've seen him act up about this Secession business. And you 've heard him call Buchanan names." He chuckled. "I 'd like to see them meet. Would n't Father trim him up?"

"But think — it 's war."

"War won't last long. It 'll be a picnic. It 'll be great sport."

"But Bascom."

"Every man takes a chance," he said gayly; and she was still. He gave her a sidewise glance as they turned between the gateposts, and smiled to himself. . . .

Ralph took the paper into his study. His rheumatism was going and of late he had been more active. His heavy walking boots stamped down the hall; the door banged after him. His chair scraped on the hearth; the leather squeaked against his back. He shook the Tribune out and let his eye follow the left-hand column down. He read it slowly, word for word, placed the paper folded over his knee, and stared into the coals.

Out of touch — he had been out of touch with everything. Here were words that stirred him. He had the eye to see the greatness that was involved in that message: "I shall take care . . . that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the States." The country needed rebuilding; it was a job like his, in cutting fortune out of the land; and he knew it meant war.

He sat there, his round full chin hard, his lips closed. For the first time he felt a pang at his age. But he would do what he could; he could not fight himself, but he could send the boys. Bascom would go like a shot; and Henry, too — by God, even if he had to drive him. He glanced at the portrait above the mantel and hardened his heart. The place would never need them, or miss them; with Rose now he could get on smoothly.

Then a blank look passed over his red face, and his lips parted. The place would not need them? It would need Henry, for he demanded an heir. He sat quite still. Parchal poked his head through the door, saw him so, and withdrew noiselessly, leaving him in the dark.

He jerked his shoulders angrily and got up. Never mind; it was impossible for him to go — he would send Henry, it was the least he could do. He went out on the porch for a breath of air, for his lungs were clamoring for something cool.

Leaning on his stick and looking across at the village lights, he thought, "I 've got all worked up, over nothing, maybe. They won't dare." But he felt inside himself that he had been right.

Leo and Pete went by behind the woodshed. Anyway, the barn was nearly done. He had been down that afternoon. Pete had said to him that five more weeks would see it through. Shingling half the east side of the roof, finishing the wagon run; odds and ends of work. . . .

Pete was saying, "Step along, Leo. Keep your head up. If things go on like this, you 'll have to learn to march. They won't let a man go on like you do. And it 's an awful thing in the army to get stuck in the pants by one of your own bagnets."

They had stopped for a word with George as they came by the carriage barn, and he had quoted to them out of the paper. "Civil War is being made by Mr. Lincoln." He had got the news from Parchal, who had had it from his wife, who had heard Bascom talking to Henry. "They won't have me in the war, but you two bezabors will have to step around and join."

It had n't yet sunk into Leo's consciousness, but Pete had instantly seen battles, bullets, bursting shot. As he went on with Leo, he saw that his assistant would need guidance. Already he had begun.

Leo said: "I 'm not yet joined onto."

"Never mind. We 'll fix that up. I ain't nagging you, Leo. I 'm just helping you along. I don't know how you 're a-going

to keep step with anybody else, seeing how you 're bothered about telling your left and right."

"You don't need to tell me. Everybody is the same in the army."

"Not if I get to be a corporal. But I 'll bear down easy, Leo."

Leo pondered as he trudged. This army business, it was a new idea. When he was a boy, Pete had bossed him, made him steal apples or carry home the fish they poached. Now, as a carpenter, Pete still bossed him, made him do the heavy work. He sighed. Perhaps in the army he would have a chance. An idea came to him as they stepped on to the bridge.

"Yeanh," he said to one of Pete's jibes, "but when they load a pack onto you, what 'll you do then? A little twerk like you?"

Pete had n't thought of that. His jaw dropped; and a placid smile began enveloping Leo's fat face. This army business — by Cripus, maybe there was something into it, he thought. And though Pete said savagely, "Well, you 'll be an almighty big mark for a cannon ball," he felt that he had got the better of his boss. It was a great idea, that foxy little twerk bowed down under all that pack, which would n't even make him sweat.

So they said nothing all the way down the street to Mercer's store, into which they marched together and found Uncle George just waking up.

"War. War," the old man said. "I went away to war in '13. That was a war, boys! We started out of Leyden in spring in two hay wagons, and just as the second got acrost, the bridge fell down, and left the women on the other side bawling like a bunch of heifers."

Leo looked amazed, and Uncle George caught his puzzled eye.

"A little boy," he said, "got drownded. He was on the rail a-playing cavalry. War was war in them days."

It was an awful tale; but after a minute Leo remembered the packs, and turning to Mercer, he asked, "When does this war start?"

And Mercer said, "How do I know?"

"I hope it waits till we 've got that barn job done. I don't want Leo shot until the roof is finished up."

"Listen to the river," said Uncle George.

They turned to the window. The sobbing noise had increased to great gasps that came to them at minute intervals.

"Cripus, it 's dark to-night!" Pete said. "Look, you can't hardly see that light at Wilder's."

It was a pin point through the trees.

"Whose is it?" asked Mercer.

"It 's from Henry's room, I 'd judge."

They sat a while together, silently, listening to the river's struggle with the ice, with only the one light to focus their stare, — there was a heavy winter smell in the store, bad air, and oil, and wet wool shirts, — until Mercer called it closing time and they went home. . . .

The lights in the village went out one by one. At Wilder's house, the lights went out. There was only a thin moon far on in its course and misty clouds coming over the stars. There was no wind.

The river went on with its work at the falls, the hole above widened at each breath the water took. A little stream began to creep over the edge there, and trickle down the icicles. At ten o'clock they began to break, splintering on the lower ice with roars like blasting powder. The ice took the sound down river till it could be heard humming faintly six miles below the falls.

The clouds drifted onto the moon. It became completely dark. And suddenly the ice fell like a wall in four great pieces, and the water burst out in a white torrent and plunged northward. The rapids lifted the ice over them in slabs and turned them over with a grinding that filled the cup of the valley to Tug Hill.

People, sleeping, woke, stirred, and sat up, and stared for a moment afraid of the dark; and then lay down again and went to sleep. The sound was familiar; for the first time since January, they heard the river roaring on the falls. . . .

XII

BEGINNING OF WAR

1

After blowing the candle out, that night, Rose stood in the window a while, looking across the valley, and let the night air, which was warm for the first time in months, play over her, until Henry, cautioning her against colds, called her to bed. They lay still side by side listening to the falls working free.

"There is n't any doubt of war," he said.

"I suppose not."

"I don't know whether it will amount to much. It 's hard to tell."

"Will it come soon?"

"If it comes at all."

She caught her breath. He put his arm about her and drew her in to him. Her back was stiff.

"It will mean you 'll be left alone with the old man and Joan."

"You 'll go?"

"Naturally."

"Do you want to?"

"No."

She said nothing. Bascom had been so eager for it.

"I suppose Dan will go," Henry said. "I don't know who the old man will get to run the farm, or what he 'll do. I think he 'd go himself if he was n't too old."

She was thinking, "If only Bascom could stay." She could not bear to lose him. To have had him and not to have had him

all these months, and then to lose him, was too bitter. She could not have him. It was n't fair. Beside her she could feel Henry waiting for her, and she put her arms round him. He sighed, his head against her breast. The touch of his face gave her an odd sense of peace. Her heart was traitor to him, but she contented him as wife. Poor boy. It made her heart ache to think of the struggle.

She went to sleep and Henry felt her twitch with her dreaming. She did not wake when the falls broke free, but she started, became rigid in his arms, and then a sigh came out of her, as if her heart had been freed, like the river. . . .

In the morning she had a thrill on seeing it. The water lapped the snow-built edges of the river, and it stretched down the valley as far as she could see, a cold bright blue. The white thunder of the falls looked yellow against the snow.

Rose went about her work like one who walks in her sleep. The faces of the family seemed to hover just out of reach of her senses; it was only with an effort that she could make them real. But at different times during the day, she was aware of Joan watching her, wide-eyed.

The river gained volume steadily all day. By night it had entirely cleared away the ice below the falls and spread out on the bottom land where the banks were low, making blue lakes, with the snow about them stained yellow. From time to time masses of it fell into the river and disappeared.

At sunset the stream, behind the barn, broke free in the beaver meadow and made itself a temporary wavering course.

The cold returned that night, and the family sat together in the parlor before a roaring fire. Ralph and Henry took turns at the paper. They were anxious to see what Lincoln would decide about Anderson at Sumter. That little force of Federals on an island in a Southern harbor stirred them infinitely more than John Brown had with his pathetically mistaken raid. Bascom spoke in short snatches with Joan, but his eyes kept wandering to Rose. She did not see him, did not hear him. She sat quietly by the fireside opposite Ralph, White's *Poems* open on her knee, her hands occupied with sewing. Her head

was bent toward the book, and her round chin, held free from the line of her throat, was resolute, but her eyes, watching the flames, were undecided.

"Will you take Belle?" Joan asked.

Bascom said: "I don't know, Joan. It all depends what happens. She would be a good mount, she 's not gun-shy."

He smiled, as if he saw himself in uniform on Belle. Juno glanced up at him from her position in the hall door and uneasily tapped the floor with her tail.

That night, as she went to sleep, Rose heard the river running. She was restless again. If only Henry had given her a child. It would be simpler, then, to be his wife. . . .

The days crept by with a slow measure. The old man kept out of doors now, watching the work at the barn. He walked up and down the runway in the shadows under the roof, his heavy tread echoing, looking up from time to time at Leo, who had begun to finish the roof. Dan came to him occasionally about the planting, and they stood on the rear ramp, from which they could see all the cleared land of the farm, and parceled out the lots, to oats, and rye, and barley. In Dan there was no thought of war. His whole soul was full of the barn and the crops which he must grow to fill it.

Up in the hills, now, they could see the blue smokes from shanties where the farmers were sugaring off. On the twenty-ninth of March, Ralph's steamer brought the first tow of boats up from Carthage, with lumber and cheese, and the teams took them through the village lock and went away toward Rome.

Ralph was restless. He called Pete to him and said, "I 'm going to get a gang of men to help Leo finish up."

He strode off to the carriage house and had George harness Ned to the buggy. The snow was gone from the roads, and the wheels cut deep into the mud.

In the morning ten men came, and the thump of their hammers could be heard at the house. At noon, as he ate, Ralph kept lifting his head to hear them.

"We 'll finish up, next month."

"Stay for your pudding," Rose said mechanically.

But he went out, and they could see the top of his hat passing the window as he went toward the barn. . . .

The days went slowly, but nothing seemed to happen, and Rose thought, "I 'm dreaming. There can't be a war."

But at last, on the ninth of April, the paper brought news of the proposed relief of Sumter, and on the thirteenth the news came of the bombardment. At last there could be no doubt of war. Rose felt something inside her that she could not bear.

Uncle George had got a ride from Dr. Jerry; had come with Wilder's mail. They had come out on the porch after dinner and had seen the old man striding up the drive. His old brown coat was frayed at the elbows, his trousers bagged from his knees; but he kept his back straight, and the old eyes under the hat brim kept looking directly before him, and he carried his stick on his shoulder.

When he came under them, he halted, put one foot on the bottom step, and held the mail up to Ralph, who said, "Hello, Uncle George. Thanks a lot. What 's brought you over?"

"War," said the old man. "But Dr. Jerry give me a ride. Freeman Tregoe's wife 's had twins."

For an instant he looked puzzled, as if he had forgotten which of the two events had impelled him to come, then he said: "It is war, truly. Us old men must get together now and learn the youngsters what 's the best."

Ralph glanced up from the paper he had opened.

"Yes." His jaw was set.

"Bascom, tell George I want the trotter and the cart. I 'm going down to Lowville right away. I want to see Knox."

Bascom went off.

"Why don't you come with me, Uncle George?"

The old fellow started with delight.

"Drive down with you, Ralph? Surely I will. By Cripus, we 'll see what 's to be done."

He took a seat on the steps, while Ralph went in for his coat and hat, and looked up at Rose. His voice wavered.

"You know I ain't been down to Lowville since the earth-

quake. I was right across the street from where it took a chimney down. There was just a wrench in the earth's inwards, ma'am, and when I looked up again a brick was coming down and landed, why, scarce half so far as that big toad, there."

He nodded his head soberly.

"That was near to eleven years ago."

"Dear me," said Rose, smiling, "you 've been staying home a great deal."

"Yeanh, my gallibunting days are done."

He returned her smile, his beard parting to show his oddly spaced old teeth.

Then he said, "The war 's a terrible thing for us that stay to home. A man don't mind being out, now, if he 's got a rifle, and maybe get a big bead on a redskin, if he 's got good tobacco in his teeth. You remember that, Bascom. You want to fight with a chaw. And if you feel sick, swaller down the likker."

Ralph came out in his big coat, his hat pulled tight down over his eyes, his whip in his hand. "I 'll not be back till to-morrow."

George led round the brown trotter, a stout deep-barreled brute, with clean legs and a good deal of white in his eye. The two old men climbed in. Uncle George's face set. Ralph took the reins and George sprang back. The off wheel lifted as they turned through the gateposts.

Rose stared for a minute at the river flood. The snow was gone; the valley showed in dark browns, with here and there a shade of green, and a blue mistiness against the distant trees. A flock of great white gulls from Ontario were flying low above the banks, and, though she could not see them, she heard the passing call of plovers.

Then she was aware of Bascom and Henry looking at her, and she heard Joan stir at her back.

"It will be soon now," Bascom said.

Henry bent down for the paper which his father had dropped.

"Just days," he said.

Rose went back into the house, but the expectation in their

eyes seemed to follow her; and when she had lectured Parchal about the ashes in the fireplaces, she went out to the deer park to be alone. . . .

It was still there, on the bridge, and she leaned on the rail and looked into the shadows. The tiny stream which made the glen had swollen, but it ran silently over the moss. In a spot the sunlight found she saw an old broken leaf going with the current, turned over and over. One of the deer attracted her attention with a switch of its white tail, and after a minute she recognized the old buck, Greg, without his antlers.

"Greg," she called softly. He lifted his head to search out the voice, then turned back to his browsing. The wet earth smell in her nostrils almost stifled her.

"Bascom, Bascom," she kept saying to herself.

She felt his arms about her.

"I thought you 'd come down here."

He was looking at her, tenderly. She did not stir.

"It 's only days now," he reminded her.

His arm tightened for an instant, then let her go. Still she did not move.

"I 've wanted you so. I 've given up all the rest — I 've kept my promise."

She might have said it herself, and she turned to him.

"Oh, dear! But what can I do about Henry? He wants me more than ever now. He has first call."

"I 'd be content with scraps," he said.

They sat down on the bench, and she let her hand steal into his.

"Dear boy. I can't do that. I can't belong to both of you, don't you see?"

"As long as no one knows."

"Oh, but I will."

"If either of us were killed, then, it would n't matter."

"It would make it worse."

"I don't see."

"No! Neither of you see! What can I do?"

"I don't know," he said sombrely. "I only know one thing."

"What is it?"

"We love each other, and you don't love Henry."

"But sometimes I do, I think. I must."

"And if you don't, Rose, what right have you to go on?"

"What right has anyone to live?"

"Yes. What right?"

"But he needs me now still more than you. I think he's afraid, Bascom."

Bascom laughed. "He would be, after all his talk."

He was thinking, "She's coming."

She said, "Kiss me, Bascom."

They heard a step on the bridge, and saw Joan. Neither of them stirred.

The girl stared at them, as one of the deer might have stared, out of still wide eyes. She said nothing. She turned and went away.

"Poor Joan."

"Kiss me now, Bascom."

2

Joan walked slowly away from the glen, her face swollen with tears she was trying to stop. At the end of the bridge, she met Juno. The bitch was lying on the damp ground, stretched out on her belly, her legs straight behind her, her eyes on the trail, her eyes alight with her strange, knowing expression. She raised her nose to Joan, and wagged her tail sympathetically.

Joan bent over to pat the smooth white head, and the bitch licked her hand. She began to cry, openly.

"What can I do, Juno?" She spoke to the animal as if it were a human being. The bitch dropped her chin on her paws, as if to say, "Why worry? I've seen it before."

"No, no. She's Henry's. Don't you see? Doesn't anyone see? Bascom's so good to me, and I love her so."

She was weeping at her own ineffectualness.

"I can't do anything. Nobody can. Only Henry . . ."

She thought, "He does n't know."

The bitch had raised her face again and was trembling. She caught Joan's skirt in her teeth, and Joan petted her as she freed the skirt.

"She was so nice to me. They 're back there now."

She left the bitch and went across the meadow, giving occasional short sobs, like a child, tired of weeping, who still wants to cry.

The barn stood against the soft spring sky almost accomplished. Only in the north end of the roof was an uncompleted space. Joan walked on to the high runway, her heels scraping on the new white spruce planks. Leo was climbing to the hole in the roof, a bail of shingles on his shoulder. He stopped to look down at her between his legs.

"No. Henry ain't up here. He 's down below, I guess. Him and Pete always has to do things down on the ground when the rest of us has to do things up on the roof. That 's how it goes."

He let out a breath and lifted his face to the sky. Joan forgot for a moment, fascinated by the sight of his thick legs moving up toward that small hole. But an instant later she remembered the two back there under the pines. It was dreadful, dreadful. . . . She did not know why, exactly, but the sight still made her want to cry. If only somebody else could see, or if there was something she could do.

She climbed down into the basement stable, and there she found Henry, in his shirtsleeves, screwing a manger into place in one of the stalls. He looked round at her impatiently.

"What is it?"

Joan shifted her weight from foot to foot, then leaned against the stall post.

"I wanted to see you."

"Well, what is it?"

He turned back to his work, placing the screwdriver into the slot of the screw. She watched his elbow waver as he turned the tool in his hand. He worked clumsily. Her lips moved, as she tried for courage to speak. He glanced round again.

"Why don't you say something? Can't you see I 'm busy?"

The tears came to her eyes, she looked scared.

"Henry . . ."

"Well?"

"You ought to know."

"Know what?"

She put her hands behind her and leaned against them. Down here, the air of the barn was still and dark about her, pressing upon her. Her breath came hard.

"Bascom and Rose," she said desperately. "They 're in the deer park."

The screwdriver slipped and drove against his finger. He swore, and turned on her, holding it to his mouth.

"What about it? Can't you say anything?"

"They 're — They 're sitting on the bench together."

"Why should n't they? What have you been crying about?"

"Oh, Henry," she said. "You 've hurt your finger."

"What do you expect?"

He turned his back on her. "Let me fix it," she said, penitently, taking a handkerchief from the pocket of her coat.

He did not answer. The tears came to her eyes. As she went away she heard him swearing to himself. Could n't anybody see? She was not angry with Henry. He had never listened to her. Her father would listen to her, but how could she tell him! It ought to be Henry, but she had just told him, and he had cut his finger! It was wicked. The only ones who ever believed her were those two back there.

She did not see where she was going, but she heard a voice cry softly, "Come in here, Joan."

Nance was standing on the kitchen porch of the farm cottage. Her brown eyes peered at Joan curiously, and Joan thought suddenly, "She knows. She 's afraid, too."

She followed the old woman into the kitchen.

"Dan won't be in," said Nance. "Set down and have a cookie."

She brought a big sugar cookie out of a jar and Joan took it, but did not eat.

"Oh, Nance. They 're back there in the deer park."

The old woman seemed to understand, but she asked, "Who?"

"Rose and Bascom."

Nance nodded her grey head.

"That girl. I thought so."

"What can I do, Nance?"

The old woman stared at her.

"You don't have to bother about them, Joan," she said gently. "It is n't your lookout."

"Yes it is. I found them. Nobody can see!"

"You have n't told anybody."

Joan nodded. "I told Henry."

Nance looked grim. "What did he do?"

"He cut his finger."

"He would do something like that." A dry grin twitched the wrinkled mouth. She sat a while, her corded hands in her lap, her eyes on Joan. And Joan stared back, mouth open, waiting for Nance to tell her what to do.

"I saw it last Christmas. It had to be. It 's that girl's fault. Nobody can blame Bascom," she said fiercely, more to herself than Joan.

"Somebody ought to stop them," Joan said.

"No, dearie. Nobody can stop them. Bascom 's been in it before."

"I know."

"Then don't you worry. I 'll watch. To do anything would make them break away; and that would hurt Ralph's heart."

"But this is family. They 're down in the park, and Henry 's right there in the barn. He 's excited there and he would n't listen."

"Go along to dinner," Nance said. "Forget about it, Joan."

Joan went out, holding her cookie in her hand. She was not crying. There was comfort in Nance's knowing, too. She gazed a moment at the barn. The sight of its great bulk, square on the meadow, soothed her. Then she saw Leo, a small round figure on the ridgepole in the distance, eating a sandwich. It was dinner time.

She went on toward the house, and inside found the family

sitting down to dinner. Henry was in her father's place, carving. He did not seem to notice her, even though he cut her a slice. She could see the red spot on his finger.

Those two were sitting without looking at each other. Perhaps all she had to do was watch. Her heart swelled toward them. They were so beautiful: Rose sitting straight, with the blood showing in her cheeks, but her eyes calm, a little heavy-lidded; Bascom with his nut-brown hair, and red mouth curved — and the sunlight lighting both their heads. They were so good to her, poor dears, and she loved them so. They could not stop to think what they were doing to themselves. She would not tell. She smiled to meet Rose's eyes, and the smile that Rose gave back to her was winning. . . .

The afternoon was still. At three o'clock a heavy vapor had come down the valley, with a feeling of rain, making the air soft. It was warm. Rose went slowly across the meadow. She wore heavy boots and carried a little basket and a pair of scissors. It had felt too hot for riding, and George, who was blacking harness in the stable door, had told of some violets he had seen on the edge of the night pasture.

The sound of the men's hammers in the barn had a muffled quality, like heartbeats, and she glanced up to see the wall grey and huge ahead of her against the dull sky. The tapping came from within. She could see no one on the roof. All scaffolding had been removed. It rested naked, full length on the spring meadow.

Rose felt her heart beat, and she suddenly changed her path to enter the stable. She went in by the upper door, and down a short flight of steps. Here the roof was low above her, the beams set square upon the round uprights, their rough-hewn sides already gaining cobwebs.

At first she saw no one, but in her mind's eye the cows stood stanchioned before her. It was all there but the warm stable smell that alone could make it real. And from the run overhead, the tapping hammers promised fulfillment.

Then she saw Henry coming toward her from setting in a window. He had put down his tools.

"Hello, Rose. I 'm going to knock off. Where are you headed for?"

She thrust aside a sudden desire for solitude. He looked so like a small boy standing there in the shadow, his sleeves rolled up over his thin arms, the slight glint of sweat on his forehead, his hair mussed and dusty, even the small red cut on his finger.

"I was going to look for violets, Henry."

She felt like a small girl with her basket, and expected him to smile. But he said seriously, "That 's nice. Can I come?"

"Yes."

But first he wanted to show her the mangers he had put in. He smiled with eagerness for praise, and looked embarrassed when she gave it to him. The work was clumsily done, but she could see that the supports were solid and would hold. He took her here and there; then went for his coat, leaving her momentarily alone. His work had been the small jobs that took time. There was nothing heroic, no work to stretch muscles and bend shoulders, such as Bascom did. Light work, like the sound of the tapping hammers overhead.

He joined her at the door, and they walked out side by side along the cow path. It led them down at a gentle grade into the swamp, where it branched into single tracks that began winding in and out, and they had to go in single file. The meadow land was higher than their heads, and they saw the barn from below, drawn full against the sky.

Then their view was shut off and they were alone, with the rush of hidden springs in the sod under their feet, and the grey spring pools stirring into rings at their tread, and the rich, wet smell of ooze.

Rose went steadily, swinging her heavy boots.

"George said they were on the far side, below a clump of birches."

"It 's a likely place for them."

They went directly to the spot, and found the violets there.

"Sit down on that log," Henry said, pointing. "I 'll pick them for you and bring them to you."

Rose obeyed and sat quite still, watching him bend over and

pick the blue blooms and bring them to her. He moved slowly after his day in the barn, his slight figure squatting and rising stiffly. She felt her breathing in the stillness, and a vague wish entered her never to stir, but to sit where she was while Henry brought her violets. There was no disturbance. Here Bascom could not find her; nor from here could she even see the barn. A breeze that had come up gently stirred the alder twigs above her head, but the violets were not touched by its fingers. There was no sound but the sound of Henry's boots and the whimpering of springs. One bubbling up beside a birch tree on her left caught her eye, and for a while she watched the black bits of earth in it whirling.

Henry returned to sit beside her for a moment while she arranged the flowers in the basket, laying them gently on wet bits of moss.

"Joan 's a queer girl," he said to her suddenly. "She came into the barn this morning all worked up about you and Bascom being in the deer park. I could n't make out what bothered her."

Rose stroked his hair with an access of tenderness.

"Poor dear," she murmured.

He glanced quickly at her fresh face. Fresh, with an appearance of sleep in the eyes. Her features had seemed to have a heavier cast. He had noticed it once or twice in the last few days. But her mouth was smiling.

"Sometimes I wonder if she is n't really crazy."

Rose stirred restlessly.

"Want some more?"

"A few, but leave a few, too. I want some more green."

He left her again, and she tried to relax. But her ease was gone. Even here Bascom had come in to her. It was harder than ever to put him out. For an instant she felt that he must be coming toward her with his quick sure stride, smiling, and she looked for his bright hair through the bushes.

But they were alone. She glanced toward Henry and just saw him bent over a new clump of flowers. The quiet of the swamp returned to her; but now with a power of suffocation, as if the welling springs had found a way to her inward being.

If only she could have the child the old man wanted; it would make it so much simpler then to play at Henry's wife. She watched him sleepily. When she saw him coming back to her she was overwhelmed for the second time that day by a desire to keep herself alone.

Henry stood before her now, with the bright heads of the flowers showing in his hands. He put them in the basket awkwardly, and she recognized the stiffness of his hands.

"Don't touch me now, Henry."

She saw the solicitude in his eyes as he sat down.

"What 's the matter, dear?"

"Nothing. I want to be left alone."

"You have n't looked the same lately, Rose. Has anything happened?"

She stiffened in self-defense; then again she saw his eyes eager, and she understood what he wanted. She saw, too, that it would offer her a protection against him in these last days before he went.

She waited breathlessly for the question.

"Do you think, Rose, you 're going to have a child?"

She said then, "I don't know."

She blushed slowly. She let him believe. "I don't know surely."

He was white, but his eyes were shining.

"Don't tell Father," she said. "I 'm not sure."

He promised. But she was ashamed when he touched her hand. She had let him believe.

"Let 's go home."

The quiet of the swamp was crushing her.

At the barn they found the old man and Bascom. Bascom grinned. "Off poseying?" Henry grinned back. Rose stood beside Ralph watching them walk toward the house. The old man grunted.

"You 've had a long day of it," Rose said.

He grunted again. He was leaning on his stick, his great shoulders hunched forward, staring down into the darkness of the barn loft. The men had gone home.

He poked a blunt finger at the basket, and looked shyly at her.

"They 're pretty," he said.

He turned from the barn again to look toward his boys.

Twelve days later they were sitting at breakfast. The old man ate his liver and bacon quickly. His cheeks were flushed. The sun coming over his shoulder fell redly on them and lit his hair. The barn was nearly done. His excitement was divided between his accomplished dream and the threatening actuality of war. Rose's hand moved among the cups, but her dark eyes gazed thoughtfully at her husband and brother-in-law. She could n't bear to let them go. Henry's quiet jubilance was making her heart ache. She had never before known his tenderness, and though it made the lie grow in upon her, when they were alone she found him close, almost holding out the waiting image of Bascom.

The old man was saying, grumblingly, "If this war comes, I don't know where I 'll get the help to handle crops. I won't dare plant enough to fill the barn."

"After the war," Rose smiled at him.

"Yes," said Bascom. "It won't be more than a year at the outside."

Ralph's face brightened. "We'll give a barn party, for anybody that 'll come."

He was in jubilant humor. "Eh, Joan?"

Her eyes stared at him.

"What are you thinking about?"

Another idea led him off. "Did any of you see the men come in?"

"No." None of them had.

He growled.

"What 's keeping them? We 're finishing up to-day."

Outside the window, as if to answer him, wagon wheels sounded on the gravel. They could see the men's heads through the window. Then Pete stood up on the seat and looked through at them. His sharp eyes were shining with excitement. He held a piece of white paper in his hand.

"Hey, Ralph! Come out! Here 's news!"

Ralph got up and went to the door, Henry at his heels. Over her shoulder, Rose saw Parchal peering through the pantry door, and behind him had a glimpse of his wife, Lucy, and George in the kitchen.

On the porch, the old man took the paper from Pete's hand.

"Read it out, Mr. Wilder."

"Yeanh," said Leo. "Read it out. If Pete has got to be a soldier he had ought to know it."

"War?" asked Ralph.

"War." Leo got rid of his quid and said the word with solemn dignity.

Ralph read: —

> "Citizens of Lewis County: — Our beloved country is infested with armed and organized bands of traitors. Our forts have been seized, the treasury robbed, and loyal citizens killed in defending the flag of our Union! The Federal Capital is in danger. The President of the United States, and the Governor of the State of New York, call the citizen soldiery to the rescue! Meet with us at the *Town Hall in Lowville,* on Saturday, at one o'clock P.M., to adopt measures for responding to these calls, and thereby testify in a substantial manner to our Love of Country, our devotion to Civil Liberty. . . ."

The others had known the certainty of war since Anderson had marched out of Sumter eight days before — a week to them, for the news came slowly to the High Falls: there was no telegraph. But Leo had not believed it until he had heard this pronunciation in actual black and white. A man in the saddle had brought it to Mercer's store that morning. Men had been reading it as he trudged up to meet Pete. He had heard snatches.

"I don't believe it," he had said, his fat face pondering. He would not allow himself to be disappointed by false hope. "Give it here," he said, and took it from Mercer's fist. His thick forefinger stumbled down the line of sixty signatures.

At the fifth his eyes brightened: "Ain't this here Ralph Wilder?"

"Yeanh," said Pete sarcastically. "It is. This poor bezabor 's learned to read!"

Leo gave it to Pete. "Fetch it along. We 'll have Wilder read this paper, since he wrote it. He 'd ought to know the meaning pretty good."

Now, listening to Ralph, he took his hat off, held it by the pointed crown. It was an old hat, a bit too small, battered, stained. He had liked that hat; but pretty soon he would be wearing a blue cap with a shiny visor, and so would Pete. He grinned down at his little boss.

"By God," he said, "I hope us gets into a company of them Zewayves."

"Why?" asked Ralph, in spite of himself.

Leo raised grave eyes.

"Just think of Pete in them loose red pants they wear."

A roar of laughter burst out. Pete's face reddened. His eyes glared at his assistant. He looked ludicrous, trying to appear unconscious.

"Get on down to the barn," said Ralph. "War don't mean holidays."

They all took seats in the wagon box and the driver picked up the lines.

"We 'll have a barn party pretty soon," said Ralph. "Every man that 's done a turn on the barn is going to come with all his family. I 'm going down to Copenhagen to-day. I wrote this paper with a bunch of others two weeks ago when we saw war coming. There 's business for me, so you get down to the barn, Pete, and finish things up. I 'll be back this afternoon, and pay you all off."

"Yeanh," said Pete, "we 'll finish up."

"Yeanh," said Leo, his eyes shining.

The wagon went ahead.

3

The afternoon air was still and clear, the sky pale blue; the three huge clouds hung motionless one behind the other, as

white and soft as cotton. Standing with a foot on each side of the ridgepole, Leo felt that he could touch them with his hands.

He stood straight, his thick legs like braces, and looked back along the long lines of shingles. A little wavering in the air just over them told him that his sweat came as much from the heat of the sun as from his own efforts.

Below him, he heard the voices of the men sweeping trash and shavings from the wagon run, gathering the tools. On his left, the swamps were grey with alder growth. Above them a faint pink tinge colored the maples, thrusting forth leaves. On his right, he had a wide view. He saw Tug Hill on the horizon, and though he searched the length of it, there was no snow. He saw the edge of the river valley, the village, and the white spray of the High Falls. He saw Wilder's house in its grove, one chimney sending up a thin, quivering thread of smoke, white against the sky. Beyond the sharp line of the eaves he could see the fields stretching to the river, a line of clear blue which his eyes could follow north almost to the point at which the sky came down to the edge of earth. It seemed to him, up there, that the air was clearer. The earth smell was not as strong, but he had a taste of it, from where Dan was harrowing the eight-acre piece with that chestnut team. And the cedar in the shingles made perfume. Leo took deep breaths.

Here was the barn under him. Whatever Pete might say about brains and such business, it represented the muscles in his arms and hands. Leo looked at the neat rows of shingles, down the eastern slope of which his shadow went in two great legs to the eaves. He had been up there alone since noon. A few minutes ago, as he was cutting the last ridge board to fit, Pete had come out of a roof window and climbed the short ladder from the lower roof to see what he was doing.

"What 's the trouble, Leo?" he had asked. "What 's keeping you so long?"

Leo had glanced down at his saw.

"I 've sawed three inches off this board four times, Pete," he had replied, "and it 's still too short."

Pete had laughed; Pete had come pretty near falling off the

ladder, he had yelled so. Leo thought of it now, standing on the roof, a figure of gigantic puzzlement, but blessed if he could see what was funny about it. It was just his measures had been wrong, probably. And Pete was always laughing at him. In spite of himself, a slow grin crept across his face. Pete had looked kind of funny, falling off that ladder. The poor little twerk! Pretty soon they would be in the army, marching south to whip the rebs; and what a whipping that was going to be! Leo saw himself behind a bayonet, and half-a-dozen rebel generals at the other end. . . .

But after a while he saw that the roof was finished. He let out a deep breath as something stirred him. He looked down at the hammer in his fist. It had been a new hammer when he started work; now the handle was dark brown and polished; there was sweat soaked into it, there were scars on the head, and one claw had lost a chip; there was all the work of the barn in that hammer for Leo to remember, if he had stopped to think. But he did not stop. He raised it in his right arm and threw it with all his might. It went through the air, spinning like a wheel, the head for the hub, a black, blurred spot, and it landed far out in the great meadow, nose down, half buried in the soggy earth.

Leo thought, "I 'll leave it lay right there."

He sighed again and looked about him, and then he saw Pete's head poking up above the eaves of the upper roof.

"Say, Leo, what 's come into you?"

Leo said, "I 've throwed away my hammer."

"You big bezabor, what did you do that for?"

Leo thought a while, but he could think of no suitable answer.

"Come on down," said Pete. "We 're finished."

"Look," said Leo, suddenly stretching his arm.

"What about that? That 's just Bascom and Henry's wife coming acrost the meadow."

"No, over there on the road."

They saw the old man driving over the meadow. The brown trotter was hitched to a light buckboard. On the back of the wagon stood a box, bigger than a coffin. The horse was lath-

ered. Even that far off they could see Ralph's face red from sun and driving.

The horse came on at a trot, came up the ramp; underneath they heard the pound of his hoofs on the run, and the rumble of wheels. Pete went scampering down like a squirrel. More deliberately, his great hams preceding him, Leo followed. The ladder inside creaked to his weight, but he did not look round until he stood safely on the planking. . . .

Ralph was standing on the seat of the wagon, whip in hand. The men were clustering about the horse, which stood with front legs wide and head hanging. In the cool shadow Leo saw his flanks pumping and a little smoke rising from his withers. Henry stood beside the nigh wheel and Bascom and Henry's wife were walking toward the group.

Ralph was looking round him at the barn. "It 's done."

"It surely is," said Pete, and Leo added, "Yeanh."

"I 've come to pay you men off for this job," Ralph said. "But there 's another one that 's just about as big. Mr. Angle down at Copenhagen 's raising a company. They 're headed for the 35th New York Volunteers. I want every man that 's worked for me to join."

He was breathing deep. The hand clenched on the whip showed the knuckles white. They saw a hard light in his eyes and his round chin set like stone.

"In that box is fourteen rifles. Two are for my sons. There 's another for every man jack of you. I don't care if you 're married. I 'll see to it every man that has a family will have mailed to them the government allowance. Fourteen dollars a month, if I pay it out of my own pocket. You know my word 's good. I don't talk about it, but I 've never owed a cent, and I call this a debt."

There was a moment's silence. Young Samuel growled, "Damned if I 'll go."

Ralph scowled down at him.

"You have n't cleared your farm, have you?"

A light sweat shone on the young man's face. "My wife 's due —"

"We 'll look out for her all right," said Ralph. Young

Samuel drew back. Ralph leaned over the back of the seat. He drew a musket out by the barrel. "Here."

Still they stood quiet.

"Give it to me."

A ham-like hand reached out, and Leo grabbed the stock. He sighted over the barrel, tossed the gun like a toothpick, and threw it over his shoulder, holding the muzzle in his hands.

"Where 's the bagnet?" he asked hungrily.

"You 'll get them after."

Pete came forward, and Leo chuckled to see the musket weight his arm.

"Say, Mr. Wilder, is this company going to be one of them Zewayves?"

"I don't believe so."

"I 'll go," said Leo, generously, after a moment's thought. "I 'll go anyway."

One by one the men took their guns, Henry and Bascom last, until the old man was left with one in his hand.

"Now before you men get home, stop at the office and get your money. It 's in envelopes, and Henry 'll give it to you. But before you leave here I promise again to look out for your families as if they were my own. We won't have time for the barn party this spring, but when you come back and the war's done, we 'll have it here."

He grinned at them, and something that they saw made the men grin back, for some the first time they had ever smiled at him. Rose, by herself in a dark corner, choked. The faces looked white in the shadow, and it hurt her to see some of them grinning. She slipped out.

George came for the horse. His crooked shoulder would not let him go. Behind the empty wagon the men marched out, Pete and Leo side by side in front. The old man stood with his sons.

"I could get you commissions maybe, but Angle has them chosen. He offered to get you each one, but it might make hard feelings. This is war. I started out of nothing here with my father. It 's a start for both of you."

"When are we going?" Bascom asked.

"May eighth. My wagon will collect our men and you 'll go down with them to Copenhagen. The company leaves there for Elmira."

He stood looking at them both.

"You 're my sons."

They went out side by side.

Henry did not speak, and Bascom started whistling as they crossed the meadow. . . .

The old man looked about him. The barn was done. Above his head hung the net of beams, the completed web — all his; every stick of it out of his own woods. Only the shingles came from southward, but they had come by the canal that he had helped to build. He walked to the edge of the run and leaned over the rail. The ten-inch uprights went down like trees, the struts spreading to the tiebeams like short branches. It was dark down there. Only occasional windows let the light in to show him the new-swept floor, still white. He smelled the clean wood smell; but his nose wrinkled: it should smell of hay, and down under the floor his ears should be hearing the stamp of a horse, and cows coming in to milk. No, it was n't quite time yet for milking. Where was Dan?

As if he had come in answer to the question, Dan walked through the back doors and came toward the old man with his easy stride, knees slightly sprung, shoulders slightly stooping. He stopped by Ralph's side and leaned with him over the rail. The army musket rested muzzle up between their elbows.

"Dan," said Ralph, after a minute. "I 'm glad you came in alone. I want to talk to you."

Dan pushed back his hat, but kept silent.

"We 've made the call for volunteers. I 'm sending my boys — they 'd go anyhow," Ralph added quickly — "and I feel that 's enough. I 'm sending all the men that worked here. Give each one a musket. There 's one left. Are you going?"

"When?"

"May eighth."

"Surely, I guess so."

The old man paused. His broad red face kept peering down, expressionless.

"Dan," he said, "you 've been with me ten years. You 've been pretty near a son to me. I tell you honestly I won't think any worse if you don't go."

"No. I guess I 'll go."

"The barn 's done. It 's going to stand empty, then. I 'm not going to try to make the farm bigger during this war. I 'll keep the herd the same."

"Who 'll you get to work?"

"There won't be many people handy. I think Driscoll will come over for the teaming. George will do the chores."

Dan thought.

Then, "I 'll plant the eight-acre piece afore I leave. I want to talk to George. He needs to know about feeding cattle. That Hereford has got to be fed right or she won't clean, and she's due soon."

"Tell him what you ought to. Dan, when you come back, you 're coming back here, ain't you?"

"Yeanh."

Again they said nothing for a time, listening to the silence of the barn. Breaking it suddenly they heard the twitter of two birds. Both men glanced up. A pair of barn swallows were finishing their nest close inside the south gable. A neat half cone of mud and straw, inverted, it was fixed smoothly to the wall. The male fluttered on the rim, and the female kept turning round and round inside, moulding the shape.

"That 's the first pair I 've see."

Ralph gazed a while, then he handed Dan the gun. "Here you are, Dan."

Dan took it and went out, leaving him alone.

Ralph leaned against the door jamb at the head of the southern ramp and watched him cross to the cottage. It was war. They would all be gone within three weeks. And the barn was done.

The shadows of the pines about his house were creeping toward him across the meadow; the evening was calm, color was being born in the west, and the shadow under the western

hills was deepening to purple. The river looked dark. The yard of the old barn held the last sunlight; and in the glow he saw suddenly the two swallows hovering over a feather. The female swooped down, snatched it in her bill, and rose straight up, her mate circling round her in glittering dashes. Ralph's eyes followed them aloft until they seemed but specks, and he could just see the female fluttering her wings daintily at the top of her flight. It was so calm that their voices came down clearly. They were excited; a happy jubilance filled them.

Then the female let the feather go. They both circled its fall, swooping this way and that with its hesitant meanderings. It came down and down, until it was but a foot above the ground. They must have let it go.

Then, like a blue dart, his bay breast almost on the earth, the male snatched it and went up in a glorious burst of speed, higher than the female had, and she followed him. And once more Ralph heard their voices high up in the sunlight.

Again they dropped it, and again they caught it just above the ground. And once again the play was repeated. Each time, Ralph noticed, it fell a few feet closer to the barn.

At last they brought it toward the door, the male carrying it. As he came he performed new evolutions. He dropped it and caught it, swooped and rose, turned, twisted, until Ralph's eyes could scarcely follow him and he appeared to fly upon his back. The female pursued, completing the evolutions of a dance. They did not notice the old man in the door, or if they did, they paid him no attention. But he almost felt the wind of their wings, they came so close to him.

Inside the barn, after a single circle, the female flew up beside the male and took the feather from him. She went to the nest without a curve, and the male followed her. Ralph took a step backward and watched her place the feather and lean her breast against it. Then she relaxed, settling down with an appearance of permanence and absolute content. Her mate fluttered before her for an instant on ecstatic wings, then rose under the shadow of the roof. Ralph stepped back to the door to resume his former position.

He brooded, hardly knowing his thoughts. The barn was done, and his sons were going away. Dan was going. Below him, the herd was filing into the old barn. They, anyway, would be in the new barn to-morrow, however small the crops would be, however small a herd they were.

Dusk was coming on. Dan had a lantern lit in the old barn. It made a mellow glow in the doors. From time to time his shadow crossed it; from time to time a cowbell tinkled. Ralph could see lights in his house. The old grass of the meadow was losing its brown look for a bluish-black, almost velvety. It was still, so still.

And Ralph heard a rustle of wings close to him, and, glancing up, saw the male swallow on the other side of the door, perched upon a spike. While Ralph watched he put his feet down comfortably and seemed to lean against the jamb, and look out on the darkening meadow, and think his own bird thoughts.

Ralph growled something to himself and walked out. But if the swallow was watching the heavy figure of the old man making its way through the dusk, he gave no sign; for he had worked hard and was tired — and happy because his nest was built.

4

One on each side of the fire in the office, Ralph and Henry sat. The old man, as usual, was erect in his chair, brows drawn down, his eyes never leaving the flames except for a quick upward glance at the portrait of his wife. Henry, also, was erect, and he too kept his eyes on the hearth. The resemblance between father and son was more evident when they sat thus together. In the candlelight one could not see that their eyes were of different color: both pairs looked black, and the round chins wore the same set expression.

There had been for the past weeks a sense of harmony between them. They no longer argued in their old way: indeed, they seldom had anything to say to each other; but they often sat as they were sitting now, each silently.

Though he was going away in the morning, there was a suppressed excitement on Henry's face. Once the old man threw a quick glance at him from under his brows and saw his tight small mouth relaxed and smiling. He did not understand; half-a-dozen times in the past few days he had felt that Henry wanted to tell him something.

He himself felt older, a little forlorn. In the past year things had changed. He would never have guessed that Henry would come so close to him, and at times he was irritated — he did not know quite how to accept their new position. Even Bascom seemed to have settled down. He had not stopped to think about it before; but now that he did, he was uneasy. Both boys were growing up; it must be Rose's influence. But for Bascom to behave for a whole year was unnatural.

In one way, though, it made him glad. He had always been afraid of something happening to the boy; he had no sense of where to stop. . . . Henry was a good boy, he had to admit it; but he could never love him as he did Bascom.

They were waiting for Rose to rejoin them. She had gone out of the office about eight o'clock to fix up some of Henry's things. The single log, which had been burning evenly with a faint purring, suddenly let out a tall, hissing, bluish flame. The bright light made arched upward shadows on the two faces. Ralph's head lifted.

"Where 's Bascom?" he asked.

Henry looked at his father with a start; then he smiled slowly as his own thoughts returned. He said carelessly, "He said he was going down to say good-bye to Nance."

The old man grunted. "That 's good. I was afraid he might 've gone out somewhere else."

"What do you mean?"

"Out to see one of his girls. Bascom has n't acted natural lately." He glanced again at Henry. "I 've felt as if something was up, something going to bust."

He stopped suddenly. He had never taken Henry into his confidence about Bascom before.

Henry said, "I think Rose has done a lot for him."

The old man seemed to be chewing the idea.

"She 's a good girl. She 's the best thing you ever did, Henry."

"Yes, Father."

Ralph went on almost querulously, "I wish you and Rose could have managed a grandson for me."

"Perhaps we . . . "

Ralph's head lifted.

"Eh?"

But Henry was gazing into the fire.

"What did you say, Henry?"

Again he seemed on the point of speaking. "Rose said — She 'll tell you something maybe when I 've gone."

"Ah." He understood. "She wants to be sure; is that it?"

Henry did not reply, but after a moment they both looked at each other. For a second their expressions were the same — a trifle hard, telling nothing. Then, together, a wide, almost tremulous, smile broke out between them. The old man's voice shook, "Good boy, Henry." He raised his glance to the portrait, the smile continuing. Henry's eyes dropped to the fire once more. He could never have supposed that going would be so happy.

His father said: "When you come back, Henry — "

His deep voice did not finish. The clock in the hall whirred, struck nine deliberate notes that they both counted.

"Rose has been out a long time."

Henry glanced at the window. Outside it was raining, and there was a thin moving wall of grey against the panes.

A knock sounded on the porch door. Nance came in. "Where 's Bascom?" she asked. Her thin grey hair hung in snakes that dripped rain on her thin shoulders, and her old dark eyes burned in the candlelight. "He was coming down at eight to see me. He ain't come."

Ralph sat still, staring at her. His elbows rested on the arms of his chair, but the hands on his thighs clenched slowly.

"I don't know," he said after a minute. His face hardened. "Ask Rose," he said to Henry.

Henry returned after a minute to find them still eyeing

each other. The old man had not moved. But Nance's gnarled hands were impatient.

"She 's not in the house. I asked Mrs. Smith and Lucy. They say she went out with a coat, toward the deer park, half an hour ago."

"It 's happened," Nance said grimly.

"What 's happened?" The old man's voice was harsh. He heaved himself to his feet and stood over her. In the firelight his bulk increased and he half raised his fist.

Nance cried out: "You fools!" She turned to Henry bitterly. "Why did n't you take her away? Why did you bring her here at all?"

"Her? Who?" Ralph's hard voice had taken the answer from his son.

"Rose!" Nance pointed at Henry. "She 's done it."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you see they 're drunk in love with each other? They 've been for months. It 's her doing."

Henry's face was white. He stepped ahead of his father. "What are you talking about, Nance?"

"*You* would n't know." Her mahogany eyes were bright with scorn. "She would n't let you know, do you think? But it 's all her doing. She 's been sly. She thought she could run like a slut up here, and no one see her."

Ralph's big hand caught Henry back, and he confronted the old woman.

"Shut up, Nance. Talk plain, but don't call names." His heavy voice threatened her, and she looked up at him, her thin figure gaining vibrance at his tone, and an old hot look passed between them.

"Down at the deer park," she said. "Did n't Henry just say she 'd gone out? I saw it coming. Joan saw it coming. Did n't she tell you?"

"She told me some silly fool idea in the barn two weeks ago," Henry admitted stiffly.

"Shut up!" Ralph thundered down at both. He was standing stiff before them, his eyes black, but his broad face was pale.

"It 's Joan I 'm scared about," said Nance. "She 's been

bothered by it. I don't know what she 'll do. It 's the kind of thing to make her sick. I want to know where she is."

"Never mind Joan; speak plain about Rose."

Nance laughed shrilly.

"Have n't I? Not plain enough? Never mind them. You won't be able to do anything now."

She lifted a thin hand to gesture, but the motion brought them all silent. For an instant they heard the rain falling with a low wet drumming of drops on the sod beyond the open door. Then, from somewhere beyond, they heard Joan's voice, very faintly, crying.

"Father! Father!"

The words came stronger.

"There! She 's found them!"

"Shut up!"

But they heard only the rain.

"Let me by!"

Ralph caught him by the arm.

"Wait, Henry." He turned on Nance. "You 've got the best ears. Where 'd that come from?"

"The meadow."

"I thought so too."

He snatched up his hat.

"You keep with me, Henry."

He stamped out ahead of them. In single file they turned the corner of the woodshed and set out along the path to the deer park. The rain was driving steadily out of the southwest. It was dribbling from the branches in great drops that the light wind brought against their faces. The trudge of their feet was muffled.

Out to their right they could hear the river.

"Rose! Rose!"

The cry rose silently to Henry's lips. He felt numb, afraid, dead. There was just the rain, and the squelch of his father's boots ahead of him in the dark.

And then they were confronted in the rain. They could not see the others' faces. But Rose's voice was low-pitched, tight in her throat. "Joan? What happened to her?"

"Yes," said the old man. "Did you see her?"

Rose's voice broke. "Is that you, Father? We heard her. We did n't see her at all. We came to look."

"Is Bascom with you?"

"Yes."

"Bascom."

They had no answer.

Rose said faintly, "He must have gone after Joan."

Henry said, "Rose!"

He heard her breath catch.

"Here," the old man commanded gruffly. "You and Nance go after Joan. I 'll take Rose back."

"Where 'll we go?" Nance asked bitterly.

They stood together silent, the rain driving down on them.

"She saw you the other day?" asked Ralph. He did not accuse; he was asking information.

"Yes," said Rose.

"She went to the barn?"

"Yes," said Henry.

"Try that."

Nance whirled. "Keep after me. I 'll get a lantern at the house."

Henry followed her blindly. Behind him he heard Rose and his father start for the house. "Rose! Rose!"

They went across the meadow with the rain striking their cheeks. They had no sight. "Keep close," said Nance. She went surely. They were alone in the silence of the rain; there were no night meadow sounds now; even the ants would keep close.

Somewhere ahead of them would be Bascom, and still ahead Joan, crying, in a voice put out by the rain.

Nance stopped by her porch for a lantern. "Wait here," she said, and slipped in to light it, quietly, not to wake Dan. In a moment she was out again, and the dim light was bright in Henry's eyes, and he saw the drops passing.

"Maybe Ralph 's right," she said.

They began climbing the long ramp, up and up, along the semicircle, with the beat of the rain on the meadow sinking

away from their feet. Then in the darkness they heard the drumming on the shingles, and a spatter from the eaves. And suddenly they had passed into the high door, and the air was still and cold, and the rain sounded somewhere remotely over their heads. There were shadows formed along the wagon run that fled away as they moved forward.

Nance stopped, holding up her hand. Henry saw the old coat moulded tight and wet to her shoulders, and the dripping hair framing her wrinkled face.

They could hear nothing, for an instant; then, from below, there rose a whimpering, anxious, with an almost human note.

"She 's down there in the stable."

Nance moved swiftly to the stairs by the door and began going down, and Henry followed numbly, flight after flight, with the shadows shortening toward their feet, and passing suddenly, and growing black above their heads, and he had an illusion of standing still, while the barn mounted round them with a sudden power of growth.

Then they stood in the stable, with the stalls before them, and saw a white shape in the corner. It was Juno, who came whimpering toward them with wet jaws. She caught Nance's free hand and dragged her into the stall, where Joan lay, her eyes rolled upward, her face dark with her fit.

Henry took the lantern and stood dumbly while Nance bent over the stiff figure.

"She ain't dead."

"She ain't dead," Henry said.

Nance flung a glance over her shoulders.

"Wake up. We 'll have to carry her back." She straightened up. "You take her feet."

The cattle door opened with a rumble like thunder.

"I 'll take her."

Bascom stood beside them in the lantern light. His chest rose and fell, from running, and his hot breath made little fogs against the blackness. His soft beard was wet with rain, and tears were running down his cheeks. "Poor Joan."

Nance mumbled something. Bascom was panting like a dog. He wiped his mouth.

"I heard her outside, and I started for the meadow. Then I got twisted and saw your light by the cottage. And then I saw it in the barn, going down behind the windows."

He looked suddenly across her body at Henry.

"God help us!"

Henry said mechanically, "God help us."

"I 'll take her," Bascom said.

He carried her before them as if she weighed nothing. Her hair was snarled over his arm, a wet black mass. Her face, when the lantern showed it, seemed asleep. . . .

The old man was waiting on the porch. His eyes went over the four of them with one keen sweep. His face was red again, his jaw set.

"Is she dead?"

There was just a hint of tremor in the deep voice.

"No," said Nance.

"I 've got out whiskey."

He led them into the hall.

"Take her up," he said to Bascom. There was no note of condemnation. He turned to Henry: "Nance will look out for her. Go to Rose; she 's in the office." His mouth twitched, straightened. "Do the best you can."

Henry trudged on to the office. He went in without knocking. He saw Rose.

She sat by the half-dead fire, her arms folded on her knees, her head bowed to her arms.

"Rose."

She raised her head slowly and her hair came loose on her forehead, and her eyes looking through it at him were dull and ashamed. He had never seen such shame. She had always looked so alive, she had carried her head so high.

"Rose."

Her head began to droop, but she forced it up to look at him. Her lips moved, but it took her a minute to find her voice.

"Is she dead?"

"Who?"

"Joan."

"No."

She was silent again. Then her mouth spoke stiffly: "You don't have to believe. It did not happen. When Joan called — "

"Oh."

"She came up the ramp and stood in the door — "

Her head sank.

He went forward. After a moment he touched her head with his hand. It did not move. He pulled up a chair beside her, looked with her into the fire.

"I too, Rose."

He did not know what it meant. He was not angry, he could not be. There was something in him that was wrong.

Upstairs they heard feet going and coming in Joan's room.

There was one thing that mattered.

"Rose." Her head lifted a trifle. "Was it true — what you told me, a little while, a few days ago?"

"I don't know."

She could not even cry.

He took one hand and held it. Neither of them stirred.

The old man walked up and down, up and down, in the hall. These children. . . . He was thinking of himself. He did not understand. Poor devils. The boys must go in the morning. They must all put on a face. . . .

Had she told Henry a lie? He did not dare ask Henry, when the two came out of the office, but stood still looking at them out of his old eyes.

Poor girl. Poor Bascom. Poor Henry.

He had done a good job here. He had finished his barn. He had handled things all his life. He could not understand how it had happened.

They said good-night to him, — he barely heard Rose's voice, — and went in to their room.

He resumed his walking, up and down. . . .

5

Joan was lying upstairs. She had been asleep. Nance still sat at her side. The thin light of morning had filled the room. It showed her white face and the movement her chest made as she breathed, and the white big hands on the turned-down sheet. It showed the old woman, hunched forward, elbows on knees, her dark eyes brooding.

The girl opened her eyes. "Nance."

The old woman started, looked at her, put out a wrinkled hand to her forehead.

"Yeanh."

"I was sick."

"Yeanh."

She took a deep breath, and lay quite still.

"Have the boys gone?"

"No."

There was another silence, longer than the last.

"Did anything happen?"

"Juno found you. Henry and me and Bascom brought you back. That 's the most I know." The old voice was grim.

"Nance?"

"Yeanh."

"Go and fetch Rose, will you?"

"Yeanh, if you 'll go back to sleep."

Joan obediently closed her eyes and the old woman slipped out. When she returned a few minutes later, Joan's grey eyes were turned to the door.

"Rose?"

Rose came in and stood beside the bed. She was dressed, her hair neat, but her face was white and there were dark circles under her eyes. Joan said to Nance, with unexpected command in her voice: "Go out a minute, Nance."

The old woman, who had been staring at Rose, started; then, without saying a word, went out of the room.

"When are the boys going, Rose?"

"At eight."

Joan lay still for a minute. Her eyes kept steadily on Rose's downcast face.

"What happened, Rose?"

"Nothing. Truly, Joan."

The tears came into Joan's eyes, and a sob broke from Rose's mouth. She dropped on her knees beside the bed and began to cry.

Joan put a big hand on her head. "Don't, don't, Rose. It 's all right."

She waited till Rose was calmer. Then she said, "Tell the boys good-bye from me. I 'll have to sleep. I 'm very tired."

Her eyes closed. Rose stole out. In the hall she met Nance returning. The old woman gave her a speculative, hard glance, and passed without speaking.

She went on downstairs.

They sat at the breakfast table together without conversation, Rose and her three men. The night's rain had cleared, leaving the earth wet, but the air warm and soft. And overnight, leaves seemed to have come to the trees. There was a soft green haze on all the woods, with shadings here and there of rose and violet. The sun was coming in the window to fall across Ralph's shoulders. He sat erect in his chair, eating steadily, glancing from time to time at his two boys. What he thought, no one could have told.

But after breakfast he called Bascom into his office. It was the only time he would ever mention last night to him; and he had considered carefully what he would say. He said it without preamble.

"Bascom, I don't know who was to blame. I don't know what happened. I don't ask. We 've all got to forget. You were cut out to be a soldier. Let 's see what you can do!"

Bascom's blue eyes did not meet his. He kept staring down at his boots, but the color mounted in his cheeks. Lord, he was handsome, with his soft beard and his sweet mouth — who could blame a girl? Ralph stopped himself. He heard the wagon coming up the drive. The hay wagon, with the rack, to carry all his men and their duffle. George was driving Ned

and the trotter in light farm harness. Dan sat behind him, his musket leaning against his knees. The wagon stopped.

"Good-bye, Bascom."

Bascom took his hand. There was a scratching and whining at the door. Juno had scented something wrong. She was afraid. Her big white body trembled as Bascom came out and stooped to fondle her. She whimpered.

The old man saw them through the door. He glanced at the portrait, his heart swelling and a burn in his eyes. The boy would pull himself out of the fire. But he must say good-bye to Henry and Dan.

Henry shook hands with him in the hall. They had nothing to say, but stared into each other's eyes. Rose, waiting her turn, thought, "They 're just alike now." It came to her that that had been the secret of their misunderstanding. There was none left now, but they could not speak to each other.

Henry came over and kissed her. The old man growled, "Come out and say good-bye."

She forced herself to go out on the porch. It took all her nerve to meet Bascom's eyes and say good-bye and feel his hand on hers. He gave her a long look. She could not read his glance. She felt a mild contempt, and she felt that his passion had not died. For herself, she could not tell; to-day there was no life in her.

It was a relief to shake Dan's hand and meet his calm green eyes that had an understanding in them. Out of the tail of her eye she was aware of Henry's pale face watching. He was springing up on the rack. The horses started. The wagon turned the corner, and Rose and Ralph followed it round the corner of the porch. The heavy wheels rumbled over the gravel, and for many days afterward, when she was alone, Rose thought she could hear the sound of their tires. She and Ralph waved. By the kitchen door, Mrs. Smith and Parchal and Lucy were waving. A window opened overhead and Nance's deep voice calling huskily. "Good-bye, Bascom."

All three waved back. They would go to the village to pick up young Samuel and Leo and Pete, and then make the round before starting north to Copenhagen. They looked so little

like soldiers in their ordinary clothes, going to war on a hay wagon.

The old man went into the house without speaking to her. Rose made her way to the kitchen and tried to occupy her mind with Mrs. Smith. She worked about the house all morning; she tried to sort Henry's clothes and put them into camphor, but even the smallest things reproached her. Nance was taking care of Joan; she did not want to go there. She could not bear to think of touching anything of Bascom's.

The old man ate lunch with her. Without the others to join them, they seemed very far apart. He talked odds and ends at first, but afterwards kept silent.

Rose went out by herself. The whole house seemed to be pushing against her heart and smothering her. She must get out. On the porch Juno walked up to her and pressed her chin between Rose's legs and stared up mournfully. Patting her, Rose thought desperately, "I must get out." She felt teary and distressed. She went back to her room and put on her riding habit. Then she went out to the barn. She had never saddled a horse, but Dainty was so eager to go out that she made things easy, giving affably to the girths and taking the bit willingly. She stood quite still for Rose to mount.

Juno trotted ahead, making small half-hearted excursions, coming back to the mare and casting anxious looks back down the road as if she searched for Belle. Rose rode in a daze. At times she caught her breath as if only now her heart began to wake.

The roads were soft underfoot, and the mare took her way daintily, single-footing, or gently cantering. Her ears were pricked, and she shook her head at roadside objects, but did not shy.

It was warm and peaceful in the valley, with somnolent white clouds. Marigolds were blooming madly along the springs, and violets showed their heads in the grass, purple or white. The buds of witch hobble had almost broken into white. And by the river occasional trilliums bloomed dark red, like an old forgotten foreign strain of blood.

Rose scarcely noticed the path Dainty took, until the mare stopped on a river bridge far upstream and Rose saw the reflection of the sky above and below, and seemed to stand upon a cloud. She looked up then at the hill in front of her and remembered the Eden stone. She had taken the path of her old ride with Bascom.

Her heart began aching, then; but she turned the mare up the hill, by the small white affable house, through the pasture bars, until she stood beside the stone in the hilltop meadow. There she dismounted, leaving Dainty to stray over the grass, and sat down with the mournful bitch beside her.

XIII

OUT OF EDEN GARDEN

Her loneliness came in upon her as she sat there. For the first time since she had left Boston she had a pang of homesickness. She saw before her long evenings with the old man's reproachful gaze straying toward her. She would feel Nance's eyes, unpitying. She would see Joan. She would have the still dark house.

She hugged her knees to her breast and stared down the valley, and caught her breath, remembering how Bascom had sat beside her here half a year ago. The time between seemed like a dream, and she herself like one waking from a heavy sleep.

The air stirred gently the hair about her ears and seemed to stroke her face. It was sweet to smell. From above, the valley took on new color, a mist of rose and lilac, with shadows of evergreens, and the moving shapes of clouds over her head and in the blue river and canal below. Truly, the old canaller might have been right when he called this the Garden of Eden, and Rose closed her eyes and reënacted to herself her own temptation. Even now, when she was able to shut out the aftermath, it tasted sweet. . . .

She heard the hound growling and opened her eyes. A strange figure was mounting laboriously toward her. The immense woman found the ascent difficult and stopped often, clutching her fat breast with a pudgy hand. At each step, Rose could see the shaking of her breast, which seemed almost to be jarred loose. Her sides went in and out like bellows under the thick red shawl. The green plaid petticoat was held up by her left hand to show two immense legs, which seemed to have no ankles, moving slowly.

All winter long, Mrs. Ephraim Jones had thought about the scene she had witnessed on the Eden stone and cherished her resolve some day to tell the girl the true story of the Garden. This afternoon she saw her chance, despite the great white hound, and came prepared, with her waddling ancient tomcat for a bodyguard. She had to cajole him from time to time to greater efforts — as if she did not have trouble enough herself with this steep hill!

Rose now heard her calling in a high soprano voice that almost squeaked, "Here kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty." And presently saw the ancient cat himself rolling into view round the green petticoat, and took Juno by the collar. Even in the Garden of Eden there might, in modern days, be sudden death.

Mrs. Jones sat down on the rock. It seemed to take some minutes for her to settle. "Well!" she said.

Rose said, "Good afternoon," dully, without encouragement.

"I seen you coming through my gate," pursued the woman as she gained her breath.

"I hope you don't mind. I love the view."

"So we do, so we do. It 's dandy, ain't it? Lord! I don't mind. I would n't be so mean as to hold a body out of Eden Garden. Did you know it was, dearie?"

In spite of herself, Rose smiled, "I 've heard so."

"Ephraim allus said it was, and he was a smart man. He 'd seen so much of all the world he 'd ought to know. Though I guess it would look just about the same if it was n't Eden Garden. But then there 's the stone."

"Yes."

"You see I seen you last year. Where 's your young feller?"

"He went to war this morning."

"Uh!" Mrs. Jones drew a deep breath. "I 've heard something about that. So there 's war. Well, my gracious, it don't mean much to us."

The old cat eyed her sleepily and folded his paws under his chest.

"You see, me and Ack just live here by ourselves; we kind of look after one another. It 's real quiet. What 's war? We

don't know. We don't even get after the mice no more. So when I seen you kissing with that young man, I thought, Ephraim is right and this is the Garden of Eden. Be you married to him?"

"Not to him."

Mrs. Jones rumbled delightedly.

"That's the proof. It was the temptation. That young man looked business to me. I been wondering. Ephraim said that there was the mark of the snake the devil made when he tempted Eve. But he would n't allow I was right when I said the deep mark on the head was where Eve stomped on the devil's head when the devil tempted her."

She shook her head.

"I resisted the temptation, but I thought it might be only me — after, I got Ephraim to marry me. But now here 's you, and that makes proof. You squashed him good?"

Rose said nothing.

The fat woman took her silence for affirmation. "Of course it ain't a natural job for any woman," she said, sympathetically. "I did n't hardly think I 'd get Ephraim squashed and I might 've gone away with him if he 'd held out. But I bore right down until it worked."

She mused.

"And I 've been here since he died, real comfortable, too. It was worth the work. It surely was."

Rose said politely, "I 've got to go back. Good bye and thank you very much."

"Won't you have a drip of coffee, dearie? With an old woman?"

"No, thank you."

Rose mounted and, with a lingering glance at the complacent cat, Juno followed her. They went past the shadow of the fat woman's head, and heard her muttering behind them.

"It must have hurt her harder than it did me."

Mrs. Jones shook her head and went back down the hill, calling, "Kitty, kitty, kitty." But headed kitchenwards the old cat made good time.

Rose rode slowly again. She could not think clearly. She paid no attention to the road. But there was a weakness in the knee on the horn which made her thankful for Dainty's good manners.

At times she thought she would have to dismount, and often intercepted one of Juno's anxious glances. The dog was whining as if she knew something was wrong.

"Stomped on the devil's head."

She had not stomped. It was Joan who had done that if anybody ever had. Rose's own head went round and round. She let the reins lie on the mare's neck and took the mane in both hands. When they stopped, she felt sick without knowing where she was. She felt herself falling.

"Here, take hold."

She slid into someone's arms. . . . When she opened her eyes, she saw Nance's dark old eyes over hers.

"Where am I?"

"In the stable," said Nance drily. "You fainted."

"What 's wrong with me?"

"Nothing much, outside of all you 've done here," the old woman said. "I 've watched you close these days. You need n't be scared; you 're going to have a baby, I guess."

Rose stared at her. "I thought I 'd lied."

"Eh?"

Suddenly Rose buried her head against the lean old breast and wept. . . .

"What 's all this?"

Ralph came upon them in the dusky stable.

"Where 's she been?"

"I don't know," said Nance.

"What's the matter. Why 's she crying?" He was always uneasy when he saw tears.

"Nothing much," said Nance. "I think she's going to have a baby."

Ralph stared down silently. Rose looked up at him. He looked mountainous against the light. She heard his heavy breathing: saw the dark gleam of his eyes.

"Henry was right."

He dropped his stick. "Keep her there till I put up the mare. George ain't back yet."

The mare had been standing with her nose close to Rose's head. He unsaddled her, watered her, and put her in her stall. "Get out of here," he said to the bitch, but did not see to it that she obeyed. "Bring my stick," he said to Nance. He bent over Rose and took her in his arms. The strong heave of his big old shoulders swept her up lightly.

"I can walk now," she said.

"Keep still," he growled. "I carried Henry's mother to her room plenty of times. I can carry you in."

He put her on her bed and went out for whiskey. In a moment he returned with a glass.

"Drink this," he said.

She obeyed, then lay back gasping on his arm. The warmth stole into her, until suddenly she felt it flooding all her being. She looked up sleepily at him.

"Father. I 'm so sorry."

"Don't be sorry."

He settled the pillow for her with his rough hands. She sighed and turned towards him. "Bend down."

His red face leaned toward her lips.

"I want to say it," she whispered. "I swear it 's Henry's."

He stood quite still in his bent position. "Don't worry, Rose. We 're all fools. I think I 've been the worst."

"It *is*."

He looked into her trouble-strained eyes over which the lids persisted in drooping, and suddenly he smiled, a flashing, tender smile.

She sighed, and closed her eyes.

He stood a minute staring at her, then pinched out the candles and tiptoed heavily out.

He walked down to the barn. George had returned and was getting in the cows.

Ralph brought a lantern and lighted it. "Here, George! Let 's put them into the new barn."

He was like a boy "Hi-ing" at the cows and pushing them, to bring them to their proper stanchions. When they were all

in, he climbed the three flights of narrow stairs and stood a while on the wagon run to hear the bells.

The boys were gone. They would be back soon, God willing; but he had something to hold his heart here. He glanced up at the swallows' nest; the birds were settled for the night.

He walked slowly home in the dark, stopped a minute to look in at Rose. She still slept, her hair loose on the pillow. He had supper by himself, swearing good-naturedly at Parchal, and drank some of his Madeira.

He sat by himself before a roaring fire, listening till the servants had gone up. Rose would be waking up soon, hungry. He went out to the pantry for milk and bread and fixed a little tray. Then he sat down a minute before the kitchen stove. It was a pleasant place to sit. He looked all round at it, with the wondering gaze that a man employs in surveying the domestic arrangements of his own house. He listened to the kettle singing. It was a nice room. . . .

When Rose did wake, hungry, as he had expected, she found him here, smiling and asleep.

XIV

DETERMINATION OF THE FAMILY

1

It was the day after New Year's. Ralph stood in his study looking out at the snow on the branches. It lay on the ground fresh and feathery, unmarred except for the cutter tracks on the drive and the hoof marks of Dr. Jerry's horse. George had driven him down to the barn. It was going to be a long siege, according to the doctor.

There was also the neat trail the hound had made round the house. Since Bascom had gone to war, she had adopted Rose, and all this morning she had been making a circle of the house, trotting with her tail down, her tongue out, her anxious eyes on the upstairs windows, for all the world as if she had a fit coming on. Ralph had gone out, intercepted her, smelled her breath and felt of her nose and looked at her eyes. As far as he could see she was all right. But she was nervous, afraid of something happening; perhaps she had heard Rose.

Something surprisingly like a shiver shook the old man's shoulders. He stepped out to the dining room and got some whiskey out of the sideboard. He poured himself a stiff drink; then stopped with the glass at his lips, put it down. What business did he have taking whiskey when Rose was going through that upstairs? He ought to be ashamed of himself. It had happened in this house often enough before. Dr. Jerry was a good man; but just then his eyes fell on Joan going by from the kitchen, and the shiver took him as he remembered the night she was born and his own wife dying.

It would n't be so bad at night: one could expect things then, in the dark; but to have such a time in broad daylight,

with the sun so bright! It made him want to get out of the house — go down to the barn. He ought to see Driscoll about the wood. The man had done well for him, but he could n't be expected to know about the wood. But that would be running away, and Ralph knew it. His round chin set; he put down the glass and went back to the office and sat down resolutely.

He had a glimpse of Parchal through the door. The man's face was a pale yellow — he always got bilious after Christmas — and Ralph could see him sweating as he went by with a basin held carefully in both hands and a dribble coming over the edge in spite of him. The damned fool was still in his dinner blacks. He 'd have to give him a shaking up.

Then he remembered it was a long siege — none of them had gone to bed last night. There was no need of the servants, all of them, staying up, but they were fond of Rose. You could n't blame them. Since the boys had gone she had become more mistress than ever. She even talked pretty intelligently now about the farm. He never would have suspected a woman's taking an intelligent interest in farming. His wife, for instance, had been keen with horses, but she had n't cared a carrot for the cows. And Rose looked out for the servants like children. A lot of the people round about liked her. Uncle George had been up on New Year's — yesterday that was; it seemed a week ago — with some chokecherry wine of his own manufacture (Ralph would n't have given such awful stuff to a dog) and asked for Mrs. Henry. "She 's give me Christmas, Ralph, and I did n't expect it, an old feller like me, so I brought her a New Year's."

"Thanks," said Ralph, taking it and giving the old man some whiskey; good whiskey, too. "She 's having a hard time, but she ought to get through."

Uncle George had taken his departure. "I won't hang around. Strangers is a bother in times like this. I mind my own times."

"You 're no stranger, Uncle George."

"No, thanks," said the old man vaguely. He was a little slower on his feet and in his wits, but he seemed to have no end. He had gone away, leaving Ralph to his paper.

Ralph had followed the war closely. After Bull Run there

had been nothing much to read. It made him boil. That man McClellan, doddering round, drilling. Why could n't he wade in with all the men he had and bust the pants off them? Nothing anywhere but muddling round. Thank the Lord, the rebels could n't seem to do any better. But he took comfort in the thought that this drilling would n't kill the boys. He 'd hate to think of Bascom getting shot; or Henry.

Henry had got himself transferred; a crazy thing to do, but probably he had wanted to get off by himself. He had done that, all right. His last letter had been addressed from Columbus, Ohio. He did not say much about his duties. He had written little more than his love to Rose and said he was well. Bascom hardly wrote at all; and then only short, bad letters. He had always hated writing; but Ralph had had a letter from Dan, painfully written, saying that he was well. Dan had added that it was rather tiresome sitting round, but the food was good enough — they had fresh beef. He asked anxiously after the new Herefords. Pete, he also stated, had become a corporal, and to hear him talk to Leo made Dan think of the farm. It was small news. . . .

At mealtime, Parchal gave him sketchy food, and afterward carried a tray up to Dr. Jerry. Ralph sent up the whiskey he had poured for himself and resumed his post in the office.

About three o'clock he could stand it no longer, took his hat and coat, and went down to the barn. He went in by the big doors at the head of the south ramp and stood a while looking into the haymow. They had only half filled it; but it had been easy to mow what they had — just pitching it off the wagon. There was plenty for his animals — but there were n't half the cattle there should be in the barn. However, it gave him satisfaction to stand there, smelling the hay smell and listening to the occasional sound of a cow getting up.

They had thrashed on the wagon run and stored the grain in the granaries. Ralph had measured off the bushels himself before dropping them through the trapdoor. He went down the first flight now and looked in to see how the supply was holding out, and raked some oats into the horse chute. They

slid down with a slight metallic sound and put a rich smell on the air. He came out again and descended slowly to the stable. He had had the house horses moved down to make less work for George, and he went into each stall in turn for a talk, lingering longest with Belle. The grey mare was hog fat. She had n't been used half enough since Bascom left, and she looked him over with an eye full of the devil.

It was dark down here among the stalls, but warm, and smelling strongly and pleasantly of ammonia. He had had the herd stancheled facing the east windows, so that now he could see all their white faces in a row. A few of them mooed at sight of him, and he took a basket of meal and gave them handfuls, watching guiltily in case George should catch him at it. Then he walked down to the trough in the exercising paddock and poked floating bits of ice with his stick. It made only a thin crust on the coldest nights; with the barn full it would n't freeze at all. He began striding up and down, imagining a full dairy of a hundred head. He would do it, by George, when Dan came back!

The cows watched his thick figure walking back and forth in front of them with placid, speculative eyes. It appeared and disappeared, as the old man passed the two-foot, unhewn uprights that stood in long rows like trees. It passed from the white lights that entered the cobwebbed windows into the intervening plots of dusk, and came out again, like an old man walking in a forest at twilight; an old man in his afternoon, walking up and down, with his thoughts. There were many things to think about, for Ralph still walked slowly when Uncle George came through the door.

The cows eyed this other old man with the same speculation. He moved as slowly, but there was a certain brightness in his carriage as he stopped before Ralph. His floppy hat was pushed back on his head, and his beard, under the icicles that enclosed the points of his moustaches, was white as the snow visible through the windows on the opposing hillside. Even in the dusk of the stable they could see the red that the cold air had painted on his nose.

"I just come over for the exercise to fetch your paper,

Ralph, and this here letter. Mercer thought you 'd ought to get it."

The eyes of the cows shifted slightly as the paper and then two letters passed from Uncle George to Ralph.

Ralph glanced at them. He then said quietly, "Thanks, Uncle George. I 'm much obliged. How are you, to-day?"

"Dying," said Uncle George with a sudden note of excitement.

"Dying?"

"Yes, sir, dying. I figgered it out last night. If any day is going to be my birthday it might as well be New Year's. And I figgered it out that if it was I must be somewheres past of ninety. If a man lives to be that old, whatever time he lives after that he 's dying. Yes, sir, I guess you can't argue that away!"

"Don't talk about it," Ralph said shortly.

"No. But I feel it. I get kind of shaddery nowadays, when the wind 's blowing against me." He paused. "How 's the girl?"

"Still bad."

"Yeanh."

Uncle George thought it over a minute, glanced at Ralph, and then passed out of the barn. He might have been the "shadder" he had mentioned, he went so quietly.

Ralph suddenly opened the first envelope. He had recognized its official aspect. Bascom? Henry?

Henry. Missing in action. . . . He was several minutes staring at it before he put it in his pocket and opened the other. This was from Captain Angle, confirming the report, but adding that Henry had been on a scouting party. The others thought he had been killed. They had been ambushed. It had all happened nearly a week ago. Ralph flushed angrily. Even Angle had heard first. He would have to wait now to tell Rose. She must not be worried now. Perhaps it was all stuffing, anyhow. "Missing in action." It might mean anything, nothing. Angle was always something of a fool. He would get Jenkins in Washington to look things up. Jenkins was in the War Department; Ralph had got him his job — he

would be glad to return a favor or two. . . . He let his glance return to the letter. Thank God, Bascom was well!

He returned to the house. Poor Henry! And for them to get the news to-day, of all days. If he could only have had a little longer, he could have heard about Rose!

He met the doctor coming down the stairs.

"Jerry."

His big body blocked the hall and his dark eyes held the doctor's.

"Yes?"

"What is it?"

The doctor was pale. But he managed a smile. "Both well, Wilder. She had a bad time. I had to operate." He paused. "I 'm afraid she won't have another child."

He heard a sort of rumbling in the old man's chest. In a moment it made words.

"Never mind, so long as she won't die." He stopped. The color left his cheeks, his eyes seemed lighter. But there was almost a tremble on his lips. "What is it?" he asked again.

The doctor, looking down, smiled again, but pityingly. He knew what Ralph wanted, and he knew Ralph knew, and he felt that he did not need to tell him.

"It 's a girl."

Ralph gazed at him without seeming to see. Then he took a deep breath, shook himself as a dog might.

"Come into the office, Jerry. You want a drink, and so do I."

In the office he showed Jerry the letters. "What ought I to do?"

"I 'd wait a few days."

"She 'll ask about Henry."

"Put her off."

"She 'll see."

"Then tell her. It would be worse for her to fret."

The doctor packed his bag and Ralph went out with him to get his horse. He got out at the house again and returned to his office. Joan came in, her homely face flushed with excitement.

"She 's so lovely, Father."

Ralph put his arm round his daughter, but said nothing, and after a minute she went out.

Henry. A girl. Thank God there still was Bascom. He had always put his hopes in Bascom. He had been right, after all. . . .

At eleven o'clock, Mrs. Smith tapped on the door.

"She 'd like to see you now, if you want to come up, and see the girl, your granddaughter."

Ralph stared at the portrait for a breath before he went up. Old memories showed in his eyes.

He climbed the stairs and went down the hall. They had put Rose upstairs and back, where she would have more sun. He opened the door slowly and went in on tiptoes and looked down at Rose.

She smiled. She looked old, still, but her eyes were bright, the same, younger than they had been since that day the boys had gone to war. She looked at a bundle in the bed beside her and he forced himself to smile as he drew back the blankets and looked at the little red face with its hint of ancientness that would soon go — life out of death.

"We must write Henry. You do it, Father."

"Yes."

"To-morrow."

"Yes."

She stared at him. He could n't meet the question.

"Have you heard from him, Father?"

"Yes."

Damn it! He had n't meant to say it! He paused, mouth open, ashamed, flushing.

Her voice sounded calm. "What is it, Father? Is he dead?"

He could n't stand this. "They say so."

"Oh."

"It is n't sure," he stumbled on, hurriedly. " 'Missing in action.' You must n't worry."

Her eyes returned to the bundle. She was n't going to cry! She had stuff.

He touched her cheek with the end of his forefinger and tried to smile. He must turn her thoughts.

"What are you going to call her, Rose?"

She lifted her eyes to his. "Henry said once if he had a girl he 'd want to call her Elizabeth."

"Elizabeth!" It was his wife's name. He looked down helplessly. "Do you want anything?" he asked.

"No, thanks." It was a whisper.

"Good night, Rose."

He went out, meeting Mrs. Smith at the door, waiting for him to go. In the office again, he lighted a candle and held it to the portrait. Then he sat down.

2

After Ralph had left her, Rose lay still. Her body felt dead, and her mind floated in a vague space between the past and the future. The present was an insubstantial thing that even the pain in her body could not grasp.

Henry was dead.

She could not doubt it. She began remembering scenes between them. . . . Their arrival, standing on the edge of the valley and staring down together through the blackness at the small window lights. They had come down together, into the blackness, and she lay there now. . . . Henry in his garden, nursing his flowers, while all the others watched the building of the barn; and then she standing with him, and the weight of his head on her shoulder. . . . Henry in his study, poring ardently over his books. . . . His going off fishing; his return and the proud exhibition of his catch. . . . His suffering under his father's half-contempt and his resentment; his surprising disinclination to leave; and his belated enthusiasm for the barn, like a small serious boy. The barn — they had all felt the barn. They had all been touched by it. Even in the mist that hovered over her, Rose seemed to see its high dark walls, built square. Joan had been found there, half trapped. They had all put something into its erection, and when the roof

closed out the sun it had closed in a piece of each one of them.

Henry was dead.

A candle burned on the bureau, out of sight beyond the foot of the bed, but shadows flickered at the touch of its flame. The door opened quietly, and Nance entered with a basin of hot water, and bandages. The old woman moved with uncanny stillness, making her arrangements. Then she came to the bed and took the baby from Rose's arm. The liniment smell in the room grew stronger. Rose weakly stretched out her hand to touch the baby — Elizabeth. Already it had a name. And with the weight gone from her arm and Nance touching her instead, the present came flooding back.

The present for Rose was one long period that began with Dr. Jerry's arrival. There had been rational moments for her, when he and she decided on Nance for a nurse. Mrs. Smith was needed to run the house; Lucy was too apt to forget; and Dr. Jerry thought it would not be safe to let Joan handle the baby. They had had to fall back on the old woman. And now, experiencing the gentleness of her hands, Rose was glad. There were amusing sides to the old woman she had never suspected — half barbaric, half sentimental. She had done all the proper things dictated by her instinct, more ancient than the wood that made the barn. She had had a bit of cotton ready, which at the last instant she had slipped unobtrusively over the linen sheet prepared for the baby's arrival. She had snatched it from the doctor's hands and laid it on its back, as a girl-child should be. From some obscure source she had produced a cricket that she placed in a box at the foot of the baby's crib, that the insect might become friendly with the child and thus in after days prevent a misunderstanding that would bring all the crickets of the woods and fields into the house to destroy her clothes. And when at last she held the baby in her hands, her face had been suffused with an unaccustomed sweetness.

She was busy with it now. The wrinkles of thin lips softened and her strange mahogany-colored eyes glowed tenderly as she hummed an outlandish little tune into the small ear. Her lean arms sheltered it possessively. Rose felt that the baby

had been taken into the farm life — Nance had brought it an atmosphere of woods and meadows and the stirring of hidden earthy worlds, the sky, the clouds, the wind that made them move — more as if she had captured the baby from death than that it had been Rose who gave her life.

But later, as the days passed, Rose found that the old woman was generous with the baby, — the mother should always have the first call, — and between them an alliance was formed, without speech, for the baby's good. . . .

Henry was dead. . . .

Ralph made two visits a day. He would sit beside the bed in the chair Nance placed for him, and talk awkwardly about the place. His hands, too, continually sought new places for themselves. His big red face was solemn during his stay, and his broad mouth had a gentle curve, and he lowered his voice so that it buzzed slightly in his throat; and after he had gone, Rose seemed to feel its vibrance with her in the room.

Joan came in and out all day, quietly, to bring Rose little gifts — a bit of green balsam, or princess pine she had dug up with Juno from the snow. Her brief stays always brought Rose comfort, for she would inevitably pause to bend over the baby with a strange wonder transfiguring her grey eyes. As certainly as the baby cried, Rose would hear Joan's footsteps quietly approaching the door.

Parchal came awkwardly with meals upon a tray, but Rose saw no more of him than his stale eyes and yellow hands, for Nance had drawn an imaginary line beyond which he was not allowed to pass. And Mrs. Smith made a daily visit, bringing with her a taste of fresh air, and a kitchen smell that almost made Rose hungry. Mrs. Smith talked cheerfully about the butter, and scrimming out the stovepipe, and said that the wood was not as clean as that Dan used to bring her. But all the time she and Nance would eye one another, stiffly, like two dogs. . . .

When she was alone again, Rose would lie still, reviewing the news of daily occurrence on the farm. She could see George hunching his crooked shoulder against a cow's flank to milk it; and her sense of smell, which had become extraor-

dinarily acute in these long days, would bring to her in retrospect the warm barn odor, and the perfume of the cow's smooth skin, and the smell of fresh milk. She would see the team moving down the woods road, in and out of blue shadows, with the woods piled high on the red sleigh, and hear the close sound of bells. She would see Mrs. Smith pumping water, her pink round arm working the handle. She would see Joan moving over the meadow, her snowshoes leaving a long wavering pattern, while Juno ran ahead to search for rabbits. Oftenest she would see Ralph entering the barn; and this vision was clearest, for she could hear him when he returned, blowing from the cold, and stamping the snow off his big boots on the porch.

She would lie on her side, then, with Elizabeth against her breast, her eyes on the blue sky beyond the pine tops; and while her gaze followed the slow procession of the weather, and her body gave itself to the baby, she would weld the two in her mind. . . .

Henry was dead. . . .

Little by little the strength began rising in her body, and the day came at last when Dr. Jerry told her that she might leave her room. Joan helped her dress and gave her an arm to lean upon as she came down the stairs to dinner. It was a grey mid-morning with a high wind carrying spits of hail and snow against the west walls of the house; but Lucy gave her a bright greeting on the stairs which she was dusting down, and Parchal emerged from the pantry and managed to grin, and Mrs. Smith laughed heartily from the kitchen and asked George, who had manufactured an errand to the house, if anyone could tell from looking at Mrs. Henry that there was another member of the family. George touched his hat and smiled awkwardly and asked, "Won't you come down to the barn to-day to see Dainty? She 's lonesome in her new stall." "Ain't a man silly?" Mrs. Smith demanded of the potato peelings that kept dripping from her knife. "Wait till you 've been and had a baby, young man, and you won't go chasing after no dainties, I can tell you."

George blushed at Rose over his crooked shoulder, and

slipped out into the woodshed, where they could hear him putting on his snowshoes. Mrs. Smith laughed.

Rose could find little to say. She stood still, leaning on Joan, content to hear their voices, and to let her eyes renew acquaintance with the rooms.

Then she went to the office door and, dismissing Joan, knocked.

"Come in," the old man said gruffly.

She opened the door to see his broad back bent over the mail upon his desk.

"What is it?" he demanded.

Rose asked, "May I come in?"

Ralph swung his chair round. "My Lord! Rose!"

His face flushed and he got quickly to his feet. "Lord! I did n't know you were coming down to-day. It 's good to see you! Lord! Why did n't you tell me? How 'd you get down?"

Rose smiled. "Joan helped me, but I 'm getting on finely."

"You ought to have told me."

"I wanted to give you a surprise. See, I 'm quite strong again, but I 'm going to sit down for a while."

He moved along beside her, one hand ready to hold her, but held carefully where she could not see it. When she had sat safely down in the chair before the snapping fire, he stood looking down at her, a smile catching at his lips, until his mouth was almost tremulous. It was the first good look at him she had had since Elizabeth's birth; and she thought that he had aged. It might have been her imagination, however, that made his hair look whiter, for his vigor remained.

"Lord!" he said again. "It 's good to see you."

He looked down at her. Now that she was sitting still, the color had come back to her cheeks. There were still lines about her mouth and nostrils, but they were going, thank heaven. She had bottom. She looked bright even if she was weak.

He rubbed his hands together, drinking her in with his eyes. Then he returned to his desk and sat down facing her.

Her eyes were on the portrait over the mantel, and she brooded. He wondered what she could be thinking of. Looking at the picture himself, he could almost be sure of some

communication passing between them. He never could understand the way women worked their minds.

But he knew she would have something to ask him; and presently she did.

"Father?"

"Yes."

"It 's quite sure Henry 's dead?"

"It seems so. The notice came through the War Office. And Angle 's written me. . . . I 've written Jenkins, in the War Department, to look Henry up. There may be another damned mistake somewhere — " He broke off. Perhaps he should n't have held out hope.

She did not meet his eyes, but rested her cheek on her hand and gazed at the portrait. Ralph waited again, and he was surprised when she spoke. She did not ask about Henry, — Henry was dead, — but about the farm. She was still feeling her way.

"Yes," he said. "Driscoll 's bringing in the wood. He stays down three days a week. When it 's all under cover, he 'll go home till it 's time to take the manure out."

"Tell me about the barn," she said, turning to him at last.

He flushed slightly; his eyes brightened. "George manages it. I help him with the feeding. It 's good for me, the exercise. The grain chutes work splendidly."

"I 'm coming down as soon as I can."

"You ought to. The stable keeps warm. When we get a full herd, the water won't get a touch of ice."

"I 'm eager to get down. I want to learn about farming, Father. Now — Henry 's gone — I want to be useful. I want to know what to do, what to see to."

He smiled. "There 's going to be plenty soon. Three cows coming in next week. One of the new Herefords." He shuffled among the papers on his desk. "I 've been wondering. I 've got to get a new bull. The one we 've got . . ."

"Baron?"

He grinned to hear him named. "Yes. He 's good stock, but I don't like his get. I hear there 's a good herd in Wayne County. I think I may go down in the spring." He took up a

paper. "I got a letter here, though. It 's about those Dutch cattle. There 's a man somewhere south of Oriskany that has brought in two from the Chenery herd; they 're good stock, he says, and I 've heard they 're heavy milkers. But they sound too new for me." He glanced up. "Black and white cattle. I never had a black cow that was any good."

Rose took the letter from him. "He 's asking a good price."

"Yes. Fancy stuff, you see."

He glanced at the mantel. "I don't know, Rose. What do you think?"

A feeling of pride swept over Rose. It was the first time that he had ever asked her advice.

"We can't do anything right away."

"No," he agreed. "I might as well stick to Herefords a while."

Parchal's cat entered the room quietly and took a position on the hearth.

Ralph shook his head.

They were silent. Outside they heard a patter of feet on the porch.

"It 's Juno!" Rose glanced up eagerly. "Let her in, please, Father."

"It 's against rules," he said. Then he smiled. "She 'll want to see you."

He opened the door and the bitch swept in, wagging her tail until it struck her white sides, whimpering as she licked Rose's hand.

"Down, Juno. There. There." Rose felt a catch in her throat.

"She 's lonely without you, now that Bascom 's gone."

The old man swallowed. Rose looked on his bent head with genuine affection. Bascom . . .

"How is he, Father?"

Ralph raised his head. "He 's doing well; he 's got shifted to a cavalry regiment. I got a letter from Angle. He could n't get on where he was. Maybe he 'll do something now. . . . I wish he was back, Rose."

She was looking at the mantel again, at the portrait of his

wife. If Bascom came back safe and sound, perhaps, then . . . There would be something worth while to have the barn for. They 'd make a handsome pair, running this farm. Bascom would knuckle down, with Rose to steady him. Lord! The blood was up in her. He could see it in her cheeks. He could imagine the two of them to himself. He had been lonely and troubled lately, with Rose upstairs and Bascom away. If Bascom would only come back! He had been worried about the boy; Bascom had not done well at first. Angle had been anxious about his attitude. But he would pull out all right, now, and if he came back. . . . Henry was dead. . . .

Rose was still looking at the portrait. There was something on her mind.

"Father," she spoke slowly. "I 'm terribly disappointed it was n't a boy. But we 've called her Elizabeth. Henry wanted her called that if she was a girl. He loved her so."

She might have been talking to the portrait instead of to him. Ralph grunted, unintelligibly.

"I want her to grow up loving this place, understanding it, like her." Rose nodded slightly.

Ralph said, "Never mind. I don't see what you could have done about it. I mean . . ." He gave it up. "Had n't you ought to lie down before dinner?"

She did not reply, and Ralph glanced up again.

"We called her Betty in the family," he said.

3

After a first hard storm, March became mild-mannered, and the snow began steadily to sink upon the meadow.

"I doubt if it 's going to bring high water this year," George said.

He sat opposite Rose on a rusty bucket, and his hands stopped for a moment in their occupation. He squinted thoughtfully through the door. From where they sprouted potatoes in the root cellar, their eyes were on a level with the snow. It stretched out along the foundation of the barn to the trees that bounded the great meadow on the north. But here and there

depressions showed in its dead greyish-white surface, and in one spot on a southern slope Rose thought she saw bare earth.

George got up to bring her another basket of potatoes from the bin.

"It 's been wettish this winter. They 're the longest sprouts I ever see in March. Looks like spring coming."

He set the basket down, and their hands once more fell to work. George eyed Rose admiringly.

"You are certainly a handy person with your hands," he said, and he made a poke at joking. "You 've learned to milk better 'n me, and you sprout better 'n me, and if it had n't been for you we 'd never 've saved that pure-bred heifer's calf. Old Ralph never was good for that kind of thing. Why, pretty soon I can get back to stable-minding the way I used to, unless you learn Belle and Dainty to plough!"

Though she refrained from answering, Rose smiled to herself. Praise pleased her. She had turned over the housework to the two maids and the baby to Nance, and she had taken hold on the farm. Once she was about, her strength had come quickly. Not only had she learned milking, but she had mastered the plans for the year's planting. She understood now the treatment of the soil, the rotation of the crops, and the reasons underlying the succession. She began to find herself arguing with the old man, and once or twice his expression of delighted astonishment when he accepted a suggestion made her smile.

The sun falling upon them at a sharp angle made the cellar warm, and brought the air a rich earth smell, which the snow still denied the meadow. Work already had made its effect visible on Rose's body. She carried herself with her characteristic easy erectness still, but there seemed to be an added depth in her bosom, and her arms showed hard and round through the sleeves of her short coat. Her eyes, too, were slower, and their gaze had acquired a brooding quality, noticeable when she turned them over the valley.

Outside the door, Juno snapped at a fly. A sign of spring, surely. Then Rose heard the bitch getting to her feet, and George said, "Here comes Ralph." He dropped his voice. "It 's nice the way he took to Elizabeth, ain't it? Mrs. Smith was

saying so just last night. Seems like he had more of a notion for her than the barn even."

Rose could hear his heavy tread coming through the snow. His shadow fell between them. Seen from below, against the wall of the barn, with the bright sky over his head, he appeared almost young. His deep voice held a note of jubilance.

"Come on out, Rose. You 've been there long enough. George can finish up, before dinner, can't you, George?"

"Yes, I can finish up. Surely." George spoke gloomily, eyeing a spider on the lintel. He heard them leave. "Surely. I can always finish up. Damn you anyways." He threw a potato at the spider, missed, spat, and returned to his job.

Ralph was saying: "I 'd like you to go up to Driscoll's, Rose. The snow 's low enough for the horses to get about. He can begin hauling out the manure over the snow. It saves the wagon's cutting in so deep."

"Could n't you go, Father? I was planning to go over the seeds for the garden."

He struck his stick into the snow and leaned on it with both hands. He gazed straight ahead across the valley from under his hat brim. It seemed to Rose that his shoulders looked more rounded than they had a year ago.

"Yes, I could go. But I 've been out all day — it 's too good to stay in. You ought to have the drive. Dainty goes well single."

"All right, then. I 'd like the drive."

George brought round the cutter after dinner. He had spent half his noon hour brushing Dainty down, and he examined her proudly over his crooked shoulder.

"She looks beautiful, George," Rose said, pulling on her gloves.

"She 's dandy. She needs work." George touched his hat. He always tried smart manners when he brought a horse round to the door. "Better watch her going up."

Dainty went at a merry trot, though the snow was slushy and spattered all the polish off her legs. She was frisky, and shied at times purely to change the rhythm of the bells, throwing out cascades of notes that seemed to cling about

Rose's face. There was a damp warmth in the air, carrying a hint of rain to come, and a haze against Tug Hill. In the woods, the tracks of rabbits twisted in and out, as if they had been leading some mystic dance during the night; but in the daylight all the woods were still, so still that through the bell music Rose thought she could almost hear the tick of working sap. When she passed balsams, the breath they put about them was almost stifling in sweetness. It had an odd power of dis-associating motion from the mind, and a languorous feeling overcame Rose until she let her back relax against the cushion, and Dainty went on at her own pace.

At Driscoll's she found Mrs. Driscoll talking to a weedy-looking dark-haired man who was familiar, though Rose could not place him until the girl introduced him to her as Lecky. Then she remembered the dog in the deer park, and the man come to get him, and Ralph's handling of the two. The successor to the dog, a blue-ticked hound with a haggard face, slunk out of sight round the barn at Dainty's snorting.

There was an awkward silence while Rose shook off her sleepiness.

"Could you get Driscoll?" she asked the girl.

"He 's spreading manure," Mrs. Driscoll said. "Lecky, would you go and fetch him in?"

The man looked sourly at Rose as he got to his feet and trudged off along the little road. Both women watched him go down to the main road, following the sleigh tracks, and cross it into a field beyond.

"My husband 's just finishing," the girl said, in a small stiff voice. "He 's working on his patch of winter rye."

"Oh," said Rose. "I 'm glad. Then he won't lose time here when he 's working for us. Do you mind being left alone?"

"No," said the girl. "Lecky stays up nights, then."

Rose felt the same barrier that had existed toward her the year before. She felt her own face stiffening, but she asked, "How 's the baby?"

"He 's well," said the girl. Her eyes still kept impersonally to the road. Her small face under the mass of red hair had no expression. "Won't you get out and set?"

"No, thanks."

"Driscoll will be right back." The silence came again. Rose heard a chicken clucking in its coop. The girl said, "I hear you 've had one of your own."

"Yes."

"A girl?"

"Yes."

"Driscoll was saying. You had a hard time."

There was a faint note of satisfaction.

Rose glanced at her again. The girl was hard; she had not seemed so that day in the berry patch. Rose wondered if she would still welcome Bascom. For the first time in many months she experienced a twinge of jealousy, even though, as Bascom had told her, the incident was closed.

They said nothing further until Driscoll drove up, Lecky sitting on the back of the sleigh. A strong smell of manure came with them, thrilling the still air of the barnyard.

"Good afternoon, Driscoll."

The man nodded, examining her out of sombre dark eyes. He handed the reins to Lecky and came limping over to the sleigh.

"Want me for manuring?"

"Mr. Wilder wondered if you could come to-morrow."

The man considered the sky before he answered, "Yes. Yeanh. I guess I could come all right."

"Thank you, then. Mr. Wilder will be glad to hear it."

Rose said good-bye and turned Dainty out of the barnyard. She felt uneasy, driving home. Lecky did not seem the type of man Driscoll would normally have round his place. She wondered what the two could have in common.

But the valley was peaceful under the warm sky, and the woods were vague and sweet. Here and there the river showed an open channel. By the time she reached the house, Rose was at ease.

There, on the porch, she found Nance taking the baby's bedclothes in from airing.

The old woman asked, "Did you remember to get the mail?"

"No," said Rose. "I forgot all about it."

"Ralph asked to have it when it came."

"I 'll get it."

"You better come in," said Nance. "Betty 's supper time soon. I 'll get it. I 'd be willing to get a walk."

"Very well."

Rose drove the mare down to the barn.

"I 'm sorry to have dirtied her up so, George."

"Never mind," said the little man, rubbing Dainty's nose. "Dirt won't hurt her."

He unhitched the mare and led her in, tugs slapping her sides loosely. Rose walked slowly back across the meadow. The drive had made her sleepy. Over Tug Hill the sun hung red and sullen. Warm weather and rain. Rose felt glad. She hurried to the house. Nance was just going down the road after the mail.

4

The High Falls broke early: they went out that evening when Mercer and Uncle George were alone in the store. Uncle George stood in the window, and when the ice had cleared from the falls he came forward to the counters and studied a calendar to see what year it was.

"I got kind of mixed in my idees," he explained. "There ain't much water, and I got to thinking it might be back in '40 again or maybe '43. Them was low-water years."

"Yeanh," said Mercer affably.

"Yeanh."

The old man stood nodding his white beard, his watery eyes contemplative. Suddenly he raised his head. "Yeanh? Why, what do you know yes or no? Why, you were n't hardly a baby them days!"

"I was twenty-three," Mercer said.

"When did you come here?" demanded the old man.

"In '52."

"Yeanh. What do you know about water in '40, or even back in '43, I 'd like to know?"

Uncle George had become belligerent these days.

"I did n't mean nothing," said Mercer, and he turned the subject. "The boys seem to be getting along pretty good in the army."

Uncle George pretended to have forgotten the discussion about water. He had mentioned the dates quite at random and he was afraid of being checked. He was getting very old. "Some day these boys will clamber up onto me like worms," he had said a week ago, only.

"What 's news?" he asked.

"There ain't a great lot," Mercer said. He knew that accounts of battles only put the old man to sleep. After the War of 1812 Uncle George had defined all war by Lundy's Lane. These slow manœuvrings seemed tedious. "Peninsula," he had asked. "What 's Peninsula?"

"That 's where the boys are now," Mercer replied, and tried to define its boundaries.

"Well," said the old man, after listening with his head a little to one side and his eyes closed, "Henry is the only one of our boys been killed yet. If you call that war, you 'd ought to have been where I was in the old days."

But he did like to hear about the boys themselves. Town business was his business; had n't Mercer often said, "Uncle George is town records?"

"Young Samuel has been made a corporal," said Mercer.

"He had a stummick for the army," Uncle George nodded. "He did n't have much notions for a man, but he 'll do good."

They went down the list of their acquaintances. Mercer often had to read letters to the wives and relatives, and these in duty bound he repeated to Uncle George. If a woman lost a letter she came to the old man to have news repeated. He did n't always get it right; for instance, he had once been waked out of the War of '12 to exclaim: "Ben? Oh yeanh. He got his head shot off by a cannon ball. I could hear it going past my ear. I hear it come — I hear it go. And then I hear it strike, and there was Ben, just lying there, like gravy."

They had had some trouble with Uncle George that morning.

"Pete and Leo is doing fine. Pete wrote up to me last week to send him down on credit a pair of galluses for Leo. He was

having trouble with his pants on account of being made to march on army rashuns."

The old man was skeptical.

"I 've seen a lot of fat men just like him. Not the Lord, nor even getting old like me, can make him lose his stummick."

While they sat, old Nance came in after the mail.

"How are you?" asked Uncle George. "How 's all the folks?"

She grinned at him. "Good, Uncle George."

"How 's Mrs. Henry?"

"She 's getting round real lively."

The old man sighed. "Right there is a pretty lady. How 's she looking?" he asked knowingly.

"Dandy," said the old woman, wheeling toward him with a smile.

He gave her a smile back and dropped an eyelid.

"So 're you. How 's the baby?"

"Fine." Nance's eyes glowed.

"Like her Ma?"

"A little maybe. I think she 's most like Mrs. Wilder. Her 's carrying that name, too."

"I 'll have to come calling one of these warm days," said Uncle George. "I 'd ought to see Ralph. I ought to pay my respects real proper now that Henry 's dead. They might not think it handsome of me if I did n't."

Nance had a letter. Her face flushed with delight as she recognized Bascom's writing, then a look of worry came into her eyes. She held the letter in both hands and turned it one way and the other. Both men watched her. After a minute she said, "I wonder would you read this to me, Mr. Mercer?"

Mercer assented eagerly; he had recognized the writing. There had been rumors among the village folks that Bascom had not found the army life to his taste. Samuel had written in a letter to his wife: "Bascom goes around with a wild sort of a bunch. He don't get on good with us steadier kind. I guess if it was n't for Dan he would have trouble with the officers. Dan has to clean his rifle for him twice. He drinks hard.

We ain't been in on any heavy fighting so far so we don't know how he 's going to do. But he 's a dandy hand at finding chickens, I will say that. . . ."

That letter had been quite some time ago. Uncle George had nodded. "Either he 's a-going to be a randy-do for fighting, or he 's going to get scared. Without he can see a bullet coming, he might get scared."

There were other bits. Dan wrote sometimes. Generally to Nelly Mercer, and Mercer had no sight of his letters. But Nelly gave them excerpts. But Dan was not inclined to gossiping — except harmless odds and ends. He had been most upset by the news of Henry's death. "I hope it ain't so. It would be bad with the baby there, and all. Perhaps it is not true. There is no real proof."

But later they had had word through Dan and Pete that Bascom had been transferred — "to cavalry," Pete wrote. "I don't know who with but maybe Morgan." Mercer was eager to hear from Bascom himself.

Nance had picked up all the gossip; but she was a silent old woman. To-day she had had her first letter from Bascom. She held it, blushing like a girl, and even after Mercer had agreed to read it to her, she seemed reluctant to open it. It hurt her that she could not read, and for an instant she seemed to consider taking the letter home unopened. She could have looked at it.

But Mercer was holding out his hand.

"Open it," he suggested.

She hesitated, then passed it to him. "You open it, Mr. Mercer. I can't read to speak of. I would n't want to hurt it."

Mercer opened the flap with a stiff thumb and cleared his throat.

Nance said suddenly, "You won't neither one of you say to nobody else what he 's wrote to me?"

They shook their heads. She sat down on a chair, brushed back a wisp of hair, folded her hands, composed her lips. Her eyes were shining. "Now," she said.

Mercer pushed up his spectacles.

"Dear Nance, —

"I have n't written anybody because there was nothing to write about. It was pretty bad at first, drilling all the time and marching around in the mud. But I like it better where I am now. I have a good horse, though I wish I had Belle with me, and there is more to see. We 've had some nice skirmishes. I am going to get a leave in April. I am coming home.

"Give my love to Rose and Father. It was too bad about Henry. I hope the baby is well. Henry turned out a lot better soldier than you would have guessed.

"Bascom."

Nance sat quite still, her lips trembling, her face white with joy. "He 's coming back. . . . Thank you, Mr. Mercer. I 'll take it with me now." She reached out her hand.

Uncle George was swinging his beard from side to side.

"A randy-do," he was saying.

Mercer seemed disappointed with the brevity of the letter. He turned it all about. "That 's all he says."

Nance snatched it from him, picked up the other mail, and passed swiftly out into the street. Her heart was high in her breast and her feet sang to her as she walked.

On the bridge a peddler overtook her, his old grey horse shuffling along drowsily, and the umbrella over his head casting a shadow about his face.

"Hullo, Mr. Turnesa."

"Why, hello, Nance. It 's coming early spring this year. I've never got this far before in March. I 'm going over to Wilder's. Can I give you a lift?"

She accepted.

"Winters ain't so hard as they used to be."

"No."

The horse nodded and switched his grizzled tail on the downgrade past the falls, and put his old quarters gingerly against the breeching.

"Will you want to buy?" asked the peddler.

"No," said Nance.

The peddler took a stubby clay pipe from his pocket and began sucking through it, noisily.

"How 's all the folks?"

"Good," said Nance. "We got a baby girl."

"No! That 's fine!" He nodded. "Families grow on a person when he 's hardly watching. How 's the boys?"

"Henry 's dead."

The peddler clucked his tongue in sympathy, and, at the sound, his horse shook his ancient head.

"But Bascom 's coming back on leave next month."

"That 's going to be nice."

"Yes."

Nance jumped out at the door and went straight to the office. She found Ralph there alone before the fire, waiting supper.

"Here 's the mail," she said, laying it down. He glanced up at the excited note in her voice. "What 's up, Nance?"

"I got a letter," she said. "Here it is."

He took it, unfolded the sheet, pursed his lips in reading. Suddenly his fingers closed tighter. Then his head lifted.

"Rose!" his heavy voice thundered through the house. "Rose! Rose!"

"Hush! You 'll wake the baby."

"Damn the baby! Rose!"

They heard her light step coming quickly. She was standing in the door, in her grey dress, her eyes soft after her stay in the nursery.

"What is it, Father?"

"Bascom 's coming home on leave."

He jumped up and grabbed her in his arms, hugging her tight to his thick chest. She got a dusty smell from his waistcoat. He had been in the haymow. He was kissing her.

"Look!" he cried, releasing her. "Here. He says it in this letter."

Nance stood viewing the two, her brown eyes tender. The old man's face was flushed dark with pleasure. His hands trembled. "Read for yourself," he was saying. "It 's to Nance."

Rose took the letter. In the dusky light she looked as young as on the evening of her arrival. While she read she felt the blood mounting to her cheeks, as though she had been infected by the old man's enthusiasm. Something pressed over her — a breathlessness, and a pounding of her heart. She had a sense of having lost her balance, as if she had just arrived again, and she was barely aware of the expectance in Ralph's gaze.

"Is n't it splendid?"

A small voice crying lustily came to her aid.

"It 's Betty. She 's not quite ready for bed. I 'll be right down again."

"Yes, yes. Run up." Ralph whirled on Nance. "You want the letter? Here it is. Go along, now."

He sat down, waiting till he should be alone. Then his eyes found the portrait. He could not see the features, but that did not matter. He could n't sit still. He got up and walked to the window. Through the limbs of the trees he could just make out the dark shape of the barn, a low long spot beyond the meadow. He would have to have a space trimmed out to see it through when the leaves came. Bascom was coming back. Perhaps it would still work out right. He sat down once more, impatiently to wait for Rose. He would n't dare speak to her; but perhaps she would feel the same way. . . .

Nance went out through the kitchen with her heart throbbing, but her old face was calm again. She had the letter pressed against her breast, out of sight inside her dress.

Mrs. Smith was entertaining the peddler and consulting Parchal about nightgowns. Parchal sat on a chair, gloomily watching the scene, while Lucy giggled and George, come in for a piece of bread, observed, "It 's too bad, Turnesa, that all women ain't cut like Mrs. Smith. What a trade they would make for a man like you!"

"Go along," said Mrs. Smith, and with a glance at him and Parchal asked the peddler, "Ain't men silly critters?"

Turnesa nodded soberly.

Nance went on out to help Rose. Outside it was beginning to rain. She found Rose standing at the window looking out into the rain, with Betty held tight to her breast. And

Nance said nothing, but put her hand to the same spot on her own withered breast, where the letter lay.

Then Rose heard her and glanced round, and they smiled together and collaborated in putting the baby to bed.

5

Rose had risen early. Bascom would be coming home to-morrow. To-morrow would be a holiday, and there were many things on hand to-day.

She had waked before sunrise, and she had lain still in her bed, lazily aware of the stillness beyond the window and the small breathing of the baby in the crib beside her. The smell of dew on the rank rich earth mingled with half-forgotten smells of rotting leaves and old manure. She could have wished never to move, with the quiet and the air in her room so sweet.

She closed her eyes. . . . A month had gone by since Nance had had her letter. The farm was preparing now for summer. Driscoll had come, and all day she had been able to see him taking the manure out on the sleighs, till the snow had gone, and then on the wagon. The wheels cut deep into the wet ground, leaving scars, into which the lips of sod curled slowly. The big team moved deliberately, dropping their heads when the wagon stopped, to sniff for grass. Driscoll worked with steady ease, handling the heavy fork in measured strokes, casting forth the manure with a wide swing in which the fork gave a shake at the end to break the clods. The tracks he left upon the meadow were as even in width as the tracks of the wagon wheels.

He was polite to her and Ralph; but there was something in the sight of his tall limping figure about the place that disturbed her. Joan would avoid him, and Rose had noticed that Juno disliked the man. The bitch would spend the whole day lying on the edge of the meadow, between the wagon and the house, watching every move he made.

Seven calves had been dropped in the dusk beneath the barn. Twice a day Rose went down to teach them to drink from

pails. At first she had to have Joan's help in holding down the lumpy heads till they had had a taste of milk. Afterwards it was easier, her one task being to keep the bucket upright against the calf's butting.

With her work, and the increasing strength in her back and arms, a peacefulness had come to her mind, and the past had grown vague. The rhythm of daily labor had made its claim; she began to feel that she had always lived this daily round, that she would always live it. When Ralph was gone, she could see herself following it to the end, her body growing older in the shadow of the barn.

The sunlight streaming against her lids made her open her eyes. She kicked the bedclothes away and lay for several minutes diagonally on the bed so that the level ray might fall along her body. The morning sky was clear and soft. As she gazed through the window, Rose thought she could see golden specks dancing in the blue. And through the specks she heard the new choruses of unseen birds, the repeated notes of robins, dropping musically through the branches, the wistful little breaks of song from song sparrows, and over and over, from the woods beyond the barn, the call of a Peabody bird. The murmur of the falls had a deeper note; the pine needles on the black boughs glistened and soughed dryly. She stretched luxuriously, one arm, then the other, then each leg, till the big toe curled back, and then all of her at once, arching her back upon the sheet and yawning. The warmth of the sunlight weighed down her lids and brought a comfortable tear into each eye, and she squeezed them out so that they ran down beside her nose, tickling her.

She sat up suddenly and sneezed, clutching her knees to her breast and hiding her eyes; then she rose, shaking back her dark hair, and slowly let her nightgown fall about her feet, and presented herself to the soft air. She stood still for a time, with her arms over her head, her body a tense white shaft, her eyelids yet heavy with sleep, her cheeks flushed. Then swiftly she began her dressing. . . .

It was a busy day, and a bright day. Joan met her in the hall, her homely face pink, saying, "Bascom will be here to-

morrow." And Ralph woke with a bellow to Parchal for hot water that sent all the servants scurrying. He came down growling for his breakfast and pinched Joan's cheek, and chuckled at Rose, and kissed them both. And after breakfast he came almost running into Bascom's room to get his riding boots. "George has n't got time to do anything but brush Belle down. I 'll polish them myself. Parchal could n't half do them."

He grinned sheepishly as he saw Rose eyeing the whiskey he had left on the bureau.

"The boys drink a bit down there, I 've heard. It 's old Bourbon — Father's. If he wants a snort before dinner, he can take it."

Rose found him half an hour later on a milking stool in the woodshed; his feet buried in rags, the can of polish upside down, and his face purple as his big hands rubbed. By dinner time he was tired out. Rose smiled at his white head across the table. He could hardly keep awake. She realized then how quickly he was aging, and her heart leaped at the thought of Bascom's swift return. To-day, with all the land about her rising with the spring, the war was vague and far away. She put her finger to her lips when Joan began to speak, and smiled; and Joan smiled back, entering a sense of conspiracy with a gust of happiness, and whispered: "Rose. You know I think Juno knows something 's going to happen. She has n't left the front porch all morning. She just lies there, watching the drive."

Rose nodded.

In the afternoon Ralph went out on the verandah and took his chair close to the baby's crib. The sun came in upon him to make him drowse. Juno lay beside his chair, her head on her forepaws, her dark eyes unwinking. Rose went out once or twice to look at them and paused to stare over the valley. The spring was at hand. It might have been a day like that a year before, and in spite of herself Rose was stirred. It had been in such a still moment that she had seen Bascom on the verandah and told him that she would come to him.

It did not bring her shame, to feel so; it might have been a dream. She saw only his bright face, the soft beard, the blue

eyes, the red mouth expectant; she loved him, and she told him. She seemed to hear again his swift speech, but like a vision a sleeper has — words were inaudible things, a part of the background; the hazy valley wall, the houses, small and insubstantial in the haze beyond the river. She glanced again at the old man and the crib and went inside, to sit and sew, in the stillness of the parlor.

Glancing from the window, she could see them all three — the baby, the old man, the hound. Of the three only Juno kept wakeful. . . . Poor dear old man! His hat had slipped forward on his nose, but it did not wake him. She had grown so fond of him; and it always touched her to see him keeping watch, as he supposed, over Betty, when she knew how desperately he had wanted a boy. He had never even looked reproachfully at her, though again and again she had seen his efforts to guard his eyes. But he was happy to-day, tremulous in his eagerness for Bascom's return. If Bascom would only come back and settle down, — marry, — Rose would move out of the house. She felt a pang at that, and her stitching stopped. She loved the place too deeply to leave it easily, but Ralph would find her a house. She would see him every day; she felt his growing dependence on her; she would do anything. . . .

And then she heard a slight tapping on the porch outside. She saw Juno, head raised from her paws, drinking scent with her nostrils; saw the bitch spring to her feet and stand electrically poised. The hound was whimpering uncertainly, eyeing the drive. Rose turned her eyes in the direction of the gate, and at the same moment the bitch left the porch with a great bound.

Someone had turned in at the gate. The bitch was leaping and leaping and leaping about him. He had caught the great head to him and bent over it. He was coming forward now. Rose had a clear view of him — his wide, dark grey hat, his blue coat and black belt, and the gold on his shoulders. He was coming swiftly and quietly with his old easy stride; Rose could see his eyes blue and shining, the nut-brown beard fuller and longer, and the red mouth smiling.

She felt her whole being leap against her throat. The simple fact of the uniform, there on the lawn, coming toward her, brought home the actuality of war. The blood was in her cheeks now; she could taste the same joy Ralph had. One had come home!

But she could not move. He was coming on the porch. The bitch at his heels moved quietly at his command, her nose busy with his black boots, seeking out the smell of possible other dogs. His eyes were dancing merrily. He stooped over the crib and touched Betty with the end of a finger. He stood looking down on the unconscious figure of Ralph. Juno poked her nose into his hand, and he petted her with his old rough gesture and laughed. Rose saw the lips part, the old curve; and then the low sound came stealing in upon her, and she knew that she was awake.

She sprang to her feet, dropped her sewing, went swiftly to the door. Bascom glanced up.

"Rose!"

She could not speak. But her eyes searched him. He looked older, stronger, more sure of himself than ever. His eyes upon hers were hungry for all their laughter. She felt herself growing weak with the luxurious tired feeling she had had that morning; she felt herself stiffen and the blood come in her face.

"Bascom!"

He came to her in one stride and kissed her cheek. The question was in his eyes.

"Betty," she said.

He nodded. "Poor Henry."

The kindness in his voice was genuine. She could not take her eyes from him. They stood together quite still.

"Lord!" he said. "I 'm happy."

Suddenly Ralph grunted, jerked back. The hat slipped down his face, bumped on his knees, fell to the floor. He stooped and picked it up, then glanced round to see if he had been observed. A small silly grin at the corners of his mouth froze.

"Bascom!" His voice caught. "Bascom?"

"Hello, Father."

"Bascom!"

He got to his feet and stood with one hand on the chair to steady himself, his thick legs trembling.

"Bascom."

Bascom caught his hand. The heavy red face of the old man quivered, eyes and mouth, and then he grinned. His shout echoed through the house. *"Bascom!"*

Juno began leaping about them, barking frantically. The baby woke and cried, and then lay still, her eyes fascinated by the bright braid. Parchal came into the hall. As they stood still they heard his flat voice floating back to the kitchen. "It 's Bascom back." The door was crowded suddenly with faces — Mrs. Smith red and hearty, Lucy blushing, and Nance pale, shy as a girl.

Bascom grinned at them.

Standing at his side, Rose had an odd sensation that she was coming for the first time to the house. They were all beginning over their separate lives.

"Come inside!" cried Ralph.

They went into the hall. Joan came running and Bascom caught and kissed her.

"I 've been down to see Belle," she said. "I 've just been there, Bascom."

He made a martial figure walking between them all, a new significance in his old swagger. . . .

He sat before them after supper, in the office, with the firelight glancing on his uniform, and they sat in chairs about him like children, to hear his history, eating his every word. The old man just sat still, hands folded, a proud smile on his mouth. Bascom had come back. He had come back with everything the old man had hoped for ; honor, a commission — there were the epaulettes to prove it.

He had come back like a lord. He had written Nance, he had said, to give her the thrill. He knew she would show Ralph the letter. They had shown him the whole place. His room, everything ready. The barn, with the cattle, the new calves, Belle whinnying from her stall at the sound of his voice. George had been there, milking, embarrassed to have Bascom see him so. Even Driscoll had shaken hands, while his dark eyes went

over Bascom's uniform, and his tight lips spoke a few polite words.

A silence came over them at length.

"Only two weeks," said the old man.

Bascom nodded, his glance favoring them one by one and lingering on Rose.

"Two weeks, but I 'm lucky to get that."

At the sound of his voice Juno tapped the floor with her tail.

6

Two weeks: for Ralph they went like lightning. He could hardly believe that they were almost over. In two days more Bascom would be returning.

He was sitting on a hillside east of the great meadow, in the door of the sugar shanty. The straight grey trunks of the maples rose before him in an even pattern against the afternoon sky. A slight easterly wind was carrying the smoke from the stovepipe downward through the sugar bush, a faint blue ribbon. Behind him he could hear the great kettle bubbling.

All the sap had been drawn. On his left the buckets were stacked upside down in three pillars. Bascom had helped the girls and Nance collect the pails as they filled; it had been good to sit where he was sitting now, and see Bascom in his old familiar clothes, moving from spigot to spigot emptying the buckets into the big pail he carried. It gave Ralph a sense of peace. All quiet in the woods except the figures, Joan and Nance, Bascom and Rose. Their voices coming back to him with a curious detached quality; and close at hand the slow measured drip from the grey trunks. They had had a good run this spring.

Beyond the edge of the sugar bush he had glimpses of the valley, — the great meadow, the barn, in soft greys and browns, the blue river, the sky above Tug Hill, — bringing his gaze back again to the sugar bush and the children moving with old Nance.

Nance and Joan had returned to the house, and Bascom and Rose were returning to him, laughing together. He had n't

seen Rose look so blooming since the early days. It quickened his breathing to see her and catch Bascom's ardent sidewise glance. It carried his memory back some fifty years. . . .

They sat down side by side on a split log that served for a doorstep and Bascom asked, "How 's the broth, Father?"

"Boiling steady," Ralph said. "I 've just built up the fire."

"How much longer will it take?" Rose asked.

"I guess till about half-past five."

"Dear me. I 'll have to be back at the house before then."

She rose quickly. "I ought to go back now. Then I can clear up everything to be free this evening."

"All right," said Ralph. "You go along. Bascom can keep me company."

Together they watched her figure receding down the hill. Beyond the edge of the sugar bush, her dress lost visible movement and seemed to glide, a touch of violet color, as if at the volition of the wind.

Ralph stirred uneasily.

"I hate to have you going back so soon."

"I hate to go."

"I wonder if this war will ever be over?"

"I don't know. It looks like a long pull."

The old man was embarrassed.

"You 've done well, Bascom," he said, his eyes staring straight down toward the barn. "I don't have to tell how proud I am. Both of you did fine."

Both were thinking, "Poor Henry," and both saw Rose's tiny figure crossing the meadow.

They were quite still, listening to the bubbling in the shanty behind them. A squirrel popped out on a branch over their heads, leaped to the shanty roof, and examined them with beady eyes. He sat up to smooth the fur on his belly; then lost his nerve and fled. Neither heeded him.

"I wish I could stay," Bascom said. "There 'll be plenty of work soon here."

"Driscoll does well and George handles the dairy pretty good. We're going to plough the fourteen-acre piece across the road."

"Corn?"

"Oats."

The old man stirred.

"I wish you could stay, Bascom. I 'd like you now to take over the place. I can manage it well enough, even short-handed, with Rose to help me, — she 's remarkable for a girl, Bascom, — but we ought to be doing more. The barn needs it. That 's what I built it for — for you and Henry."

He stopped. "Henry 's dead," he said after a while. He checked. "He must be. I did n't think so at first and I wrote Jenkins. He could n't find out anything, and he has n't written lately."

Bascom nodded.

"There 's Rose."

"Yes, Rose would do well by it. But after her 'll be Betty. And then the name is going to change."

"We don't know Henry 's dead."

"It 's certain. They 'd have written if it was n't."

"I guess it is."

"I wish now everything 's over you and Rose could come together."

He had thought it all over to himself. Some people he knew would be shocked at such a thought. But up here, he would n't care. It was a natural law. It was fair, the just thing for the place. He continued his thought in words.

"Jerry said she might n't ever have another child. You can't be sure about that. She would be good for you, Bascom. She 's as fine as you could find."

Bascom was poking the earth between his feet with a stick.

"I can hardly bear to go away now."

The old man started, gazed down on his bowed shoulders.

"It 's going to be easier for you now."

"Oh, the army part, yes. I wish we were sure about poor Henry."

Ralph grunted.

"I 'd take a chance." A flash of arrogance made his eyes dark.

But Bascom did not look up.

"She makes me feel half-drunk," Bascom was saying. Ralph

thought, "Lord, how do you think you make any girl feel? You ought to know by now." But he kept quiet. And Bascom went on slowly, feeling for words.

"Before I went away, I had n't any idea, really, of what I was doing. I was scared at times after that about coming home again. But it was sweet." His red lips curved slowly. "She 's got such a hold on things here now, I — I don't know. She almost runs things herself."

The old man started up, swearing. "By God, she don't run me! Take a chance. There 's still time for you two to get married. I 'll tend to that. I 'll take the chance. Bascom, boy, she 's a darling. Don't you mistake. I 'm getting old, but not so old I can't feel that at times." Their eyes met in a long hot stare. "By God, Bascom, you 're built on my lines. You get on along now. I 'll mind the fire. And when the cooking 's done, I 'll come back myself. We 'll draw the syrup tomorrow."

Bascom rose and went down the hill slowly. But as he went, his stride lengthened. The old man watched him go. He felt a little cold, but there was a tingling underneath his skin. By gander, he could still plunge, and he did n't mind cold water — if he *was* older than he used to be.

He had plunged before. He remembered the time his wife had said that it was a pity the water from both rivers did n't join above the Leyden Falls. It would make such a pretty spot for an outing in the summer. He had agreed with her. And, by God, he had done it for her.

He owned land between the rivers along Fish Creek, which ran into Black River from its rising barely a hundred yards from the long still water on the Moose. Ralph had had a channel dug and then dammed the Moose just below the still water, and one night turned the whole Moose over. In the morning the falls were a pretty sight, and they had had an outing place for three summers. It had cost a lot, because the three mills below the dam on Moose River went dry, and the owners wanted to blow up the dam. Ralph had had to keep ten armed men on the dam; he had kept them there three years while the matter went to court. Of course he had been licked in the end,

and the whole damned countryside had marched up to blow the dam out. They had laid powder under the length of it and set it off all at once. It was a fine sight. He had driven up with them to see it, and served out rum. And the next year the bunch of twerks had sent him down to Albany without his half trying for the job. They knew he was n't afraid to plunge, by God, and he could stand cold water.

His face, flushed with his thoughts, was as red as his waistcoat. The sun found him out there, at the entrance to the shanty, a heavy-set thick figure, brooding on the past.

The lowering sun cast long shadows. He saw the shadow of the barn stealing up the slopes toward him. And while he watched, the sunlight caught the shingles, turning the roof to gold.

Poor Henry was dead. Bascom and Rose now.

As it should be.

7

There was yet an hour till sunset as Rose walked down from the house, and the air remained warm and moist. The sky had a translucent blue, almost liquid in quality; when the stars were born they would look big to-night if no clouds came. But it was clear, still, without a breath of wind; only in the western half an indefinable movement of color was taking place. A faint suffusion of amber had begun above Tug Hill. Rose paused.

Flapping toward her out of the west, in twos and threes, came the crows. Their black wings made patterns, irregularly changing as they came, their sharp calls passing back and forth. They were heading for the pines in the glen. Rose had learned that they would hold there their spring convention. She would hear them talking till dark fell; gossiping, arguing, announcing their plans for the nesting. They would meet every night now till the new moon came and grew and passed its full. Nance said they sometimes danced in the full moon. Rose had heard them greeting it as it rose on the heels of the sunlight; and then their cawing sounded like the clapping of

hands. She watched them now till only three or four stragglers remained on the wing; then she went on toward the barn.

The sun was painting the boards with yellow light, throwing the shadow of the gable to the far corner of the meadow, where Driscoll still ploughed with the chestnut team. The ground was wet and the plough cut heavily. When it heeled on its side to turn toward the next furrow it threw off a glittering spark.

Driscoll limped steadily behind it, guiding it with one hand. The reins were looped about his neck. He steered the team with words. He was ploughing late to-night, to finish the strip. He wanted to get home for three days. Two of his cows were coming due.

Beyond the roof of the barn, Rose could see the top of the sugar bush, from which now the smoke was rising vertically, a violet thread against the east. As she went ahead, the roof of the barn mounted, until the trees were hidden, and she could see only the smoke.

She felt uneasy. She knew as surely as the sun was setting that Bascom would come to her during the evening. She knew it was Ralph's wish that he should do so. She knew that the servants knew, and that they talked about it among themselves, though no echoes of their opinion came to her. But what she should answer, she could not tell. She had no wish to know beforehand; she was unwilling to be troubled. Before Bascom's return, her instinct would have denied him. There was Betty to help her say no. Her instinct then had been to hold herself free to guard the baby while she made a place for her. Now she wondered if she should not seek an ally. She did not doubt her ability to hold Bascom true. Her barriers were coming down. From the moment he had appeared on the porch, she had felt them falling.

A year ago it had been wrong. She had not been able then to say, "No"; to turn away. She knew now that she would not be able. But it was all right now. War was a bitter thing, annihilating time. The old man wanted her to marry Bascom. She had felt it in his eyes, like a cloak of flames; she had felt it in Bascom's.

The dusk of the stable was grateful. Here for a time she could put aside her problems while she fed the calves.

She entered to find that George had finished milking. He was coming toward her down the planked run, a great forkful of hay upon his crooked shoulders.

"Evenin'," he said. "I 've left the buckets by the pens."

"Thank you, George. I 'm late."

"No, not much. I 'm about through, though."

"Have you seen Joan anywhere?"

"She come through here about half an hour ago and went down in the night pasture, her and that bitch."

He passed her with a rustle of hay against the low beams and a sweet dusty smell. Rose went on to the first pen.

The calf was standing by the door, nose to the crack. Rose smiled. The others would be standing just like him. Down the length of pens she could not hear a sound.

She took up the pail and unlatched the door, shoving back the bald head with her knee, entering, and closing the door behind her. The calf came forward with a rush. He got his head into the pail before it was half down and Rose had to move her hands quickly to save it from capsizing. There was a strong sucking sound, and at the noise the barn came to life. The other calves began blatting, notes of complaint, of envy, of sheer hunger. From the line of stanchions one or two cows answered with deep moos.

In the interims the calf's sucking swallows struck the air sharp blows. He shoved the pail vigorously against Rose's knees and drank with his nose buried to the eyes in milk, his smooth tail arched and switching. The smile still on her lips, Rose waited patiently till the sucking began to produce tinny echoes. Greedy little beast, he was trying to inhale the foam! She pushed him back, slipped out, and went to the next.

She could hear the horses stamping from side to side as George grained them. After a few minutes they ceased and from that end of the barn their steady munching came. George called that he was going home to supper. It grew dark swiftly in the barn. The walls housing the mows over her head seemed to assume increasing stature; as she moved to the last calf,

she was aware of them and the darkness they had taken in. As she stood with her hand on the door of the last pen, she could barely see the calf's white nose. The door beyond the stanchions showed a square of light that had no strength to penetrate the barn. She briefly considered lighting a lantern, but the calf's insistence made her open the door.

"Poor girl, it 's hard being the last one of all. I 'll come to you first to-morrow."

The calf did not wait to hear her.

As she began to drink, quick steps entered the barn and halted.

"Is that you, Rose?"

Recognizing the tread, she was momentarily silent. Bascom; she could see him silhouetted; and she imagined his bright blue eyes peering into the blackness.

Unfamiliar with the barn, he began moving cautiously towards the sound of drinking.

"Here I am," she called. Her voice was full and husky. Her knees relaxed and she leaned against the pen wall. "I 'm in the last pen. This way."

He came to the corner of the pen, and then she heard his hands feeling their way to where she stood. He rested his forearms on the wall and leaned over.

"Noisy little devil. Does she always make that fuss?"

Rose laughed. "Yes. She 's the last one to-night and she 's trying to make up for it."

He waited silently until the calf was through. "Shall I get a lantern?"

"No. No, thanks."

He helped her gather up the pails. They clattered in his hands. A stanchion creaked as a cow turned her head. They passed the long file in silence and set down the buckets in the milk house. Bascom pumped the water for her.

"This was n't in the plans," he said.

"No, Father added it on. It was quite a piece of work making the hole in the foundation for the door."

"Have much trouble getting the water?"

"No; Nance found it with a hazel wand."

They left the buckets standing, brimming full.

"Rose, let 's talk."

Rose turned. She felt herself weak and unpoised. On impulse she turned to the loft stairs.

"Let 's go up to the wagon run. The doors are open. We can sit there."

Abruptly she started up them. He followed, guiding himself with his hands. Rose mounted swiftly and surely, leaving him behind. She found a sack of corn by the door to sit upon, and when he reached her, breathless from his awkward climb up the five flights, she was again at ease.

The shadows stretching across the meadow from the river woods gave a sensation of movement to the world, over which the barn stood still. They were high up, here. In the eaves just over them, swallows were settling, with little fretful twitters. Way down across the meadow, they saw Driscoll, still ploughing.

The afterglow was bright in the west. A hawk came sailing along across the flat, on a level with their eyes. His course was unstudied; slow, but keen. The mice must be coming out.

"Rose," Bascom spoke softly. "You know how I feel about you. It is n't the same. I 'm ashamed of that."

She stirred. "Let 's not talk."

"I 've got to. I 've got to leave to-morrow night. I 've got to tell you."

"You don't have to feel ashamed. It was my fault, too."

"Maybe it seems too soon."

"Yes."

"But Henry 's dead."

She was silent.

"Father feels the same way about it I do. If he feels it 's all right, it ought to be all right for us."

Rose's eyes were following the hawk. He had paused now, holding himself in check with occasional small strokes of his wings. Behind her the barn was still. Driscoll still ploughed. The shadows were going; all the meadow was shadow — the hawk alone a bright speck. Far down under her feet a cow sighed.

"I was all wrong, Bascom. I feel now I ought to do some kind of penance. But I 've loved you, I think, from the very beginning. I always will. It was n't fair to Henry; but I could n't help myself."

"Darling, Henry 's dead."

"Don't touch me. I 've got to think."

He stood back awkwardly again.

She said, after a time, "It seems a little soon."

The hawk was still in the same spot, waiting to pounce. He had seen something, beyond a doubt, and all the chances favored him, for he made no shadow.

"Remember, Bascom, I 'll always love you. It 's the brightest thing I have."

"Dear."

His voice tightened. "Then I don't see why . . ."

"Don't hurry me. You can't see, poor boy. I know. It 's, it 's — For one thing, there 'll be Betty."

"I love her. I 'll be good to her. I 'll swear that. Can't you see it anyway?"

She mused, her fingers struggling with a wisp of straw.

"Just because I traveled round before I knew you does n't mean I won't be a good father. The old man had his twirl before he found Mother."

"Oh, that makes no difference to me, now. There 's something else. I probably will never have another child."

"I want you, Rose."

He looked down at her expectantly. He felt nervously upon the edge of life; a step either way, he would fall. If his hand could only touch her! She looked so sweet, bent over her foolish straw. He felt tender, afraid, angry. What was holding her? If he could only . . .

"You see, there 's still something else. You 've got all of me, Bascom. You 've always had it, I think. But there 's something — "

"If it 's Betty — "

"It 's something else, before Betty. I can't tell you."

"Don't."

She raised her face. Her eyes were glistening. He could not touch her now, whatever happened. It gave him a moment's exaltation. In a minute, in only a minute . . .

"You would n't mind . . . my holding back . . ."

"I 'll take what you give. It 's more than I can expect, even part of you."

Her mouth had become alive. The lips were full, quivering, soft. It was so still. The barn enveloped them with its mysterious dark breath.

Rose came slowly, almost painfully, to her feet. She was turning to him.

Then they heard Joan.

She was striding up the ramp in the twilight. Her boots were muddy, her dark hair mussed. She looked tired. But she was smiling, and her big hand was holding out to Rose three violets.

"I went down into the night pasture," she was saying. "I wanted to see if there were any violets. You like them so. But I could only find three."

She waited expectantly. Rose turned to her slowly, the echo of her smile for Bascom still on her lips. She took them gently.

"Thank you, dear."

She stood a minute bent over the flowers. That piece of her heart. She must give it time. Only a year ago, she and Henry . . . She remembered his face that day. She was afraid; she might see it again; she could not be sure.

She turned again to Bascom, her mouth stiff and dry.

"It 's only a year."

He was still watching her.

"Remember what I told you. It 's always been yours, Bascom, whether it 's the good or bad part of me. I can't answer now. When you come back, I 'll know, then."

She left him in the barn's dark. It would be harder to tell Ralph.

As she went down the ramp, she saw the hawk pounce. . . .

Bascom stood still until she had crossed the meadow. He

did not see Joan. He was aching miserably. He too saw the hawk pounce, and rise, and fly leisurely away. He could not see what it held.

"Bascom, Bascom. I 'm so sorry. I 'm sorry."

Joan was still miserably beside him.

He turned to her. "Never mind, Joan. Go home to supper. Tell them I won't be in. I may not come in to-night."

"Where are you going?"

"I think I 'll take Belle out. It 's going to be the last chance we have."

He watched Joan across the meadow. Then he followed her. He might as well get out to-night. What had it mattered, coming home?

He saw them through the window, sitting silently at table. Rose was white. Joan stared miserably at her plate. The old man was eating, mechanically. Bascom was glad he could not see his face. He slipped up to his room and dressed in his uniform. Might have just a taste of the whiskey his father had put out. Old Bourbon. He poured a mug on the washstand half full and took it to the window. The dew was falling under the pines. He tilted back his head and let out his breath. He had another drink, laughing suddenly to himself. The old man knew Bourbon.

As he came out again Juno sneaked up behind him. She waited till they were in the meadow before touching his hand. It was almost dark now, but he could see Driscoll still finishing the piece of ploughing. Driscoll, he thought bitterly.

Suddenly he laughed. Juno and Belle and he. He might as well. It would be on the way to Boonville. The mare knew her way home.

8

No one saw him leave the barn, and he kept the mare on the grass as they rounded the house. There was a light in the office window as he passed, but there was only bitterness in his heart. He had been so full of hope, two weeks ago, sitting there. What did it matter now?

The two white shapes went by like ghosts. Beyond the gateposts the mare broke into a canter, and the bitch ran at her side, giving great high bounds in her joy to be out once more on the old night rounds. Her dark eyes kept swinging up toward Bascom. "Good old girl," he said, and she wagged her tail widely as she ran. Of all beings on earth she loved him most truly.

At the fork of the bridge the mare paused, and for an instant Bascom sat still. The river was black under him now, the water licking the stone piers gently as it passed. Overhead it had grown black; and the evening stars were being obscured one by one. Somewhere, high up, a wind had been born, bringing clouds out of the east.

He laughed again, his old laugh; and his heart began to rise. He would seek comfort where it could be found. He swung the mare into the river road and gave her her head. She was eager for running; he scarcely felt her settling down to the road, but step by step the head of the bitch was lowered, her back and tail straightened into line and she fell back a pace or two, and then drew up again like a white arrow against the streaming dark. Wind rose in his face; he drew down his hat with his right hand and turned himself to the run.

Within the hour he was in Leyden, and a few moments later the mare had swept into Driscoll's road of her own will. Bascom brought her up sharply and slipped off. He left the reins on her neck, knowing she would stand where he left her, and started across the barnyard, his hand on Juno's collar.

The darkness was complete. There were no lights in the house, nothing anywhere to see. The night was quite still. He went cautiously from instinct, but he heard nothing but the river sucking at its banks. He stood still by the little porch. The wind high up had cleared away the clouds it had brought, and once more the stars were coming out. In a bay far up the river a few peepers were trying to sing, single stray notes, tentative, barely heard.

He had a moment's uneasiness; but there was nothing to hear, and he shook it off. His knock was light and sharp. For an instant there was no response. He knocked again, listen-

ing. He could hear no sound. Then Juno raised her head and the door opened noiselessly before him.

"Who is it?" He could just see the small white shape; and in the same breath she answered herself: "Bascom!"

The note of genuine alarm made him pause; but immediately she caught him, drawing him inside and calling in the bitch.

"Bascom! What made you come?"

He put out his arms to find her. She let herself be taken.

"I came to see you, Pearl." He stooped to kiss her.

"Just once." Her voice was a whisper. He could feel her trembling.

"What 's the matter, Pearl?"

She slipped weakly close.

"Driscoll 's back at the place. He won't be home for half an hour. Why did you call the bitch in?"

She shuddered suddenly.

"Has he been hard on you?" Bascom's voice was harsh.

"No. Never. But he thinks things. He does n't ask. He 's got Lecky staying here while he works at Wilder's. Lecky sleeps in the barn. I was afraid he 'd see the dog."

"Lord!" Bascom stiffened. At the same moment the bitch growled and started scratching at the door.

"Good God!" cried Bascom.

They both heard it then. A scrape of hoofs from the road, a sharp slap, like the crack of a whip, and the mare's frightened galloping.

Pearl drew back as his arms fell. "He saw you."

Bascom cursed.

"He 's scared off Belle."

"He 'll be watching for you now. Oh, Bascom, why did you come?"

"Keep still, can't you."

He listened desperately. The close darkness of the little hall, with its musty old smell, pressed against him. His breath began to come in short blasts. He could feel the sweat breaking out on his face. And then, sooner than he could possibly have expected, incredibly soon, he heard feet coming through

the barnyard. Not Lecky's, — not quiet, cautious footfalls, — but feet coming openly, and limping.

Horror possessed him. He had never been caught, or nearly caught, before. The man was coming in to find him. He must have been watching while he ploughed. Bascom remembered now that he had not seen him when he left the barn with Belle.

"Can I get out?"

"The parlor window."

"Get back to bed."

But she led him first to the window. They stopped for a breath. They heard the latch lifting on the door.

"Now," she breathed. "I drew the bolt."

He slipped out and started round the house. Driscoll was on the porch, he had not seen him yet. He was carrying a rifle in his hand. Pray God the mare had not run far.

Bascom made the road before the man knew he was out. He stopped an instant. He had forgotten the bitch, but now he heard a slither of toenails on the window sill, and she came running.

Driscoll swung about, saw her.

Bascom ran. He had no gun. He had nothing with which to stand the other off. He ran, heedless of the noise of his boots in the soft mud. The bitch caught up with him and threw a low growl backwards.

At the main road he stopped, to look for Belle. There was no sight of her. He whistled desperately. There came no answering sound of hoofs. Then he heard feet following him. They came quietly, but the limp was apparent. With an almost audible cry, he leaped off the road into the woods, floundering desperately. In a moment he was lucky enough to find a rough wagon track along which he fled into a small clearing — Driscoll's patch of winter rye. He had just sense enough to keep off the soft ground and circle it. At the far edge he paused beside a hemlock and glanced back.

There was here a faint light, enough to show moving objects. In a moment he saw Driscoll appear, and stop. The man looked right and left, hesitantly. Bascom remembered Juno. Her white body was like a lantern. He leaped back into

the woods and began running once more along the low ridge where there was little underbrush.

As soon as he had a safe lead, he stopped. The bitch came up to him and licked his hand.

"Go home!" he said.

She wagged her tail.

"Go home, Juno, good girl."

She licked his hand with a low whine, reared up on her hind legs, and slapped her paws on his shoulders. One scraped his face.

"Go home!" he cried aloud.

She wagged her tail and licked his face.

He struck the soft nose. She dropped to the ground, jumped back; stood still — puzzled, but forgiving.

Behind them a stick cracked. Bascom plunged ahead. The bitch followed, a little behind him. This was their first night's running together since he had come home. It was not in her to desert him.

He ran until his chest ached, stopped, feeling safe for the moment, and tried to think. For an instant he thought that he might be mistaken. Why should the man want to kill him? But the instinct of the hunted was on him, and he knew. The man would not be following him so carefully . . . A wet nose poked into his palm and in fresh panic he struck it and ordered the bitch home. She leaped back, again puzzled, then accepted it as a kind of game and circled him just out of reach, and finally lay down, panting, waiting for his next move. And once more, in a soft wet spot, he heard the limping swift footsteps. . . .

The boughs that struck his face shook wet dew on him. His hands were cut with old briers; he had lost all sense of direction. He had never hunted these woods. He seemed to have been running blindly for hours, but whenever he stopped the bitch came into sight, keeping just her distance, but following devotedly, and a few seconds later he would hear the limping footfalls, very softly coming.

At first they had always been behind him. Now he began to hear them on his left or right. Once, blind instinct made him

turn sharp from his course, and an instant later he heard them on his right. The man had been waiting just ahead of him. He was Indianing Bascom. Knowing the lie of the land, he was judging the direction of Bascom's flight and taking shorter cuts, so that in spite of his limp he was able easily to keep pace. And when he could not see the faint blur of the hound's white side, he could hear Bascom running.

Bascom was going slower. Sweat was streaming from his neck and chest. His lungs labored endlessly for air. Now, when he stopped, he heard less often the limping footfalls. Driscoll was going stealthily as he had more time, still-hunting.

Once Bascom, crouching, thought he had escaped. He waited several minutes. The hound was lying down behind a log on a ridge above him. Then he heard steps coming on the leaves. They passed him out of reach. Even if he could have jumped on the man he knew that Driscoll would be too strong. He remembered the day they had handled rock for the big barn together.

The man went past, suddenly spotted the bitch, and once more Bascom fled. He began now trying to lure Juno within reach of his hands. If he could get her and strangle her, he might get away. But she was wary of him and kept out of reach, wagging her tail gently. He cursed her, bullied, entreated. She would not come. The thing he had loved truest in his life was going to kill him. It made him weep. . . .

At last the unreasoning panic of the hunted dropped upon him, in a small balsam swamp where he lay with his face to the bitter water, and the sweet heavy smell fogging his lungs. He broke away in the last blind run that would continue till his heart gave out. He went a hundred yards and reached a clearing. He did not think of circling it, but continued straight into the open. It was only when he reached the middle that he had some notion of where he was. He recognized dimly the clearing he had first entered — Driscoll's patch of winter rye.

The mud sucked at his shoes and he could hardly lift his feet. Before he had taken two steps, something flashed in front of him, something struck him. He did not even cry.

Driscoll laid the gun down on the log on which he had been

sitting for a quarter of an hour, waiting Bascom's return, and went over to the still body. He stooped there a minute, his dark thin face unreadable in the dim light. Then he went slowly back to his gun. He waited. Presently the bitch came out of the woods. He looked at her for a minute, laid down the gun again, and went back to the barn for a shovel. In a few minutes he was back in the clearing again, with the shovel and a small bag.

He walked up to the body, which the bitch was nosing frantically, and drove her back with a word. In the middle of the field of rye, he began digging a grave. He worked slowly and methodically. When it was deep enough he rolled the body into it and covered the face with his handkerchief. He shoveled in the dirt and leveled it with his hands. Then he took the bag and began sowing the ground with spring rye. It would catch up with the winter seed and leave no sign, and the grave was deeper than a plough.

When he was through he returned to the log and took his gun. He started home. Suddenly a low howl broke out in the little clearing. The man stopped, looked back. It came again, low, vibrant, unutterably mournful. He put down the shovel and gun and with a slight shrug returned to the grave. He called the bitch; she came to him docilely; and he started to lead her home. But at the edge of the clearing she turned back.

He repeated the manœuvre, with the same result. Then he took her collar. She snarled, but did not bite. He let her go. When he reached the gun he stopped again. Once more the howl rose behind him. He took the gun back and the shovel. She was sitting on the grave, not attempting to dig. She looked at him, a long look, raised her nose, and howled. Reluctantly he put down the shovel, loaded his gun, and shot her through the head. He buried her beside Bascom, and went back for more spring rye. His hands shook as he sowed the second grave.

No one had seen, no one had heard.

Lecky had gone home; he would not dare tell.

9

The family sat at breakfast the next morning, eating listlessly. Dark circles marked Rose's eyes, and her hair, newly arranged though it was, seemed lifeless.

Ralph looked across at her, raising his head, but sitting with his shoulders still bent. She had heard him that night walking up and down in his room until long after the old clock in the hall had struck twelve. The lack of sleep did not show on his full red cheeks, but his eyes were pale and brooding. She had told him before supper what had happened yesterday, and he had sat quite still under her words. Only after a time he had looked upward to the painted figure of his wife; and then he had said, "I 'm sorry." She had kept silence, and after a while he had continued, ponderously, "Rose, I hoped you could have done it. But you 're the only one that could decide it." Later he had kissed her with unusual tenderness. They had not said more.

Now he said, "I went down to the barn this morning. Belle had come back. She was standing outside the door, George said, when he went down for milking."

Rose eyed him wordlessly. Neither saw Joan, her freckled face frozen, her underlip drawn in, on the brink of tears.

"What had happened?"

"I don't know. But I went to his room. I guess he slipped in at supper time and got his uniform. It was gone. He probably did n't want to stay and went down to Boonville."

"How did she get back?"

"She knows the road. He did it once with her on a bet."

Ralph was not worried. His heart was sore. He had not had a chance to say good-bye.

It was Joan who finally broke silence in a tense voice.

"Where 's Juno?"

Ralph lifted his head again. "Eh?"

"Where 's Juno?"

He stared at her only half-comprehending, his mouth a little open. Rose had never seen him look so old. Then, as the question sank in on her, she started.

Ralph grunted. "He probably could n't send her back. Maybe she went with him. She 's good riddance."

He had always been jealous of the bitch. Only since the boys had gone he had tolerated her because she was Bascom's.

Joan still appeared afraid; but Rose accepted his opinion. Parchal came in with the eggs and the breakfast was resumed. . . .

The routine of the place took hold of them once more; and the two weeks of Bascom's stay became a memory for all of them. Rose went about her tasks with increasing eagerness each day. Only the old man brooded. His interest in the farm became almost aimless at times. She would see him wandering about the lots at odd times of the day, or sitting on the ramp of the barn, his wide felt hat drawn down over his eyes, his shoulders bent.

Two weeks later, while she was driving the brush drag over the field Driscoll had sown in the morning, she saw him sitting there with another man beside him. The newcomer's rig stood at the foot of the ramp, the horse nibbling at the new grass blades. After a time they walked down to the wagon and came driving toward her.

The man was a stout, hearty fellow, wearing a serious expression that sat awkwardly upon his plump cheeks. Ralph introduced him as Luther Hurley, United States Marshal. "He 's wanted to see us about Bascom." Rose noticed then that Ralph's face was red and hot, and that his eyes were angry.

Hurley raised a plump hand on which he wore a big gold ring.

"It 's hard on me, miss, having to come here like this. But I got to."

"What 's happened?"

Rose felt a catch in her breathing.

"Why, we don't know for sure. That 's what I 've come here for." Mr. Hurley was more tactful, perhaps, than he had been with Ralph. The old man was still breathing hard. "You see, Bascom ain't reported to his regiment after his leave.

I got a teleygram to look into him up here." He pushed back his hat to wipe his forehead with a blue handkerchief. "You see, they claim he must have deser — "

"Don't say it again!" Ralph's jaw came out.

"Sure, sure," Hurley said placatingly. "Ralph said he 'd started back a day ahead of time."

"Yes, he did."

"Thank you, miss."

"If you want, I 'll call George over. George!"

George came limping from the corner of the lot where he was mending fence, his dark face a little on one side, his bright eyes fixed understandingly on Rose.

"Yeanh," he said in answer to her question. "He went back."

Hurley shifted uneasily, making the wagon creak.

"For me, it 's good enough, what you all say here. But me, I 've got to make them bezabors in Washington out a letter. I 've got to report I 've searched the place, and report questioning, and that kind of things."

Ralph swore. "All right. All right. You go and look. George will go if you want."

"Thank you."

"Go ahead. Do anything you want. But don't come around me any more. Get going. Get out. Get the hell out of here."

"Sure, sure. Thank you. Sure."

Hurley made off hastily as soon as Ralph had got down. They watched him making gestures to George as the two rode back to the house.

Ralph said, "He would n't desert."

"No."

They looked at each other miserably.

"Something 's happened to him. But he 's lucky. Always lucky. Not like poor Henry. He 'll turn up."

He said the words defiantly. But he would not meet Rose's eyes. And she felt sick inside.

He trudged back to the barn, and she saw him there, all through the afternoon, sitting by himself, his waistcoat making a bright spot in the great doorway.

About the baby's supper time, as she was finishing the drag-

ging, she saw him headed for the house. He never missed Betty's supper, now.

She felt tired herself when she reached the house, but she mechanically saw the baby settled, while her mind worked dully with the problem of the marshal's visit. He had gone, now, thank heaven, perspiring and apologetic to the last.

She dressed leisurely for supper, and sat down to rest in the study. Ralph had not come in. They said he had been in earlier, but had gone out again after the baby's meal. He was off somewhere by himself. Rose waited patiently for half an hour before she began to worry. Then she went out to question the maids. Lucy, it appeared, had seen him going to the deer park.

Rose told Mrs. Smith to keep things hot, threw a shawl over her shoulders, and went down to call him. He did not answer. It was almost dark in the glen, and she could hear nothing between her calls.

Then, on the little path along the brook, she heard him sobbing.

10

Ralph had walked out of the house. He went down to the deer park with his erect, thrusting stride, and Mrs. Smith, looking from the kitchen window, had seen nothing wrong with him.

When he came to the edge of the glen, he halted, undecided. Then he opened the gate and took the path down. He would rout out old Greg. He felt savage; a talk with the old brute might soothe him. That damned fat marshal had upset him.

He went along the dark path without looking to left or right. He did not hear the water running; he did not smell the sharp swamp smell; he did not see anything until he came face to face with the old buck a hundred yards from the bridge. The animal was standing still beside a stone, and he did not move at Ralph's approach. He showed no horns; he might have been a doe, a mooly doe. Ralph shook his stick at

him, but he did not move. His eyes caught a glow from the sky as he shifted his head.

Ralph got no satisfaction from standing up to him like that. The buck had no horns. He had done it before in the rutting season, when it had been something to do with the savage old brute keeping just his distance and no more. But now — Greg's eyes gleamed; they looked hot. Ralph chuckled, the first sound he had made since he had left the house; Greg hated him, always would hate him. He seemed to know that it was Ralph who had shut him up in here. He ought to, for Ralph had carried him in on his own shoulders. That was how he kept him in hand; the brute remembered Ralph's carrying him, and was scared of him. He knew he could still do it.

"Get out of my way."

Ralph lifted his stick and stepped forward. The buck shifted a few inches and got deliberately off the path. Too deliberately. Ralph gave him a good whack and grinned. He would walk up to the end of the glen and back, and ease himself with exercise.

The buck still stood by the rock, staring after him as he went round the turn. Ralph watched him through the branches, then walked on, stumbled over a root, and swore at himself. He was n't as quick on his feet as he had been — even a year ago. But he had made the old buck step aside just as he used to. . . .

He walked slowly on to the head of the glen, taking care over his footing. There he sat down on a log at the head of the slope. Through the trees he could see the dark shape of his barn beyond the great meadow. He looked at it for several minutes, without really seeing, a stifled feeling in his chest. It was getting dark out on the meadow, too, and he knew that he ought to return before it got too black in the glen to see. But it was so quiet here, with just a spot of light left above Tug Hill, and the quiet water running by his feet.

The water made a little tinkling sound over a stick and, little by little, Ralph became aware of it. When he had discovered its cause, the silence of the glen came in upon him,

and he rose to his feet. It was too quiet. A heavy dew was falling. He felt cold.

He started slowly back along the path, peering carefully at the ground, stopping now and then to feel his way with his stick. It was very dark here at the upper end; he could scarcely distinguish the trees.

Then a stick snapped on his left and his head swung toward it sharply. He stood still. There was no other sound. He grunted to himself; one of the deer. What had he stopped for? He went ahead, and a few minutes later he heard a stick snap on his right. He stopped once more; but he saw nothing. He squatted down to look under the branches, but it was too dark. He unbent his knees stiffly, and his hand made a strange gesture. He wiped the back of his neck.

In a moment he heard the swish of a branch returning to its place. It was on the trail behind him. At the same moment he came to the bend in the trail where he had last seen Greg, but the old buck was gone. Ralph felt afraid.

He did not quite run, but his haste was checked by the dark. He stumbled once, and his heavy shoes thumped on the path and his heel kicked against a stone. He wanted to look back, but he did not dare. He knew that he should turn. Yet the gate was just a hundred feet ahead and in a moment he would reach it.

The bridge loomed over him against the twilight and the black etched branches of the pines. There was a little light on the trail, and in spite of himself the old man began to run. And at the second step he was struck between his shoulders and sent sprawling on his face.

The force of his fall brought back his courage. His chin had hardly struck the soft earth before he squirmed over on his back, and reached up instinctively with his hands.

The old buck was straddling him, attempting to gore him with his bare head. By sheer chance, Ralph's hand grasped one ear and his fingers closed. At the same instant the buck backed off to use his hoofs. Ralph held on.

By twisting with all his strength he brought the buck's head close enough to reach the other ear with his left hand, and for

the moment he was safe. The buck did not have enough strength in his neck and shoulders to shake off the old man's weight, and as long as his head was held down he could not use his forefeet. They were as motionless as stone.

Ralph looked up into the large hot eyes. The buck had waited a long time; and who would ever have guessed that he would attempt murder at this season of the year — for murder showed in the deer's eyes as plainly as if they had been human.

Ralph felt the cold wet touch of the earth coming through his coat to his back, and it released his breath. His arched chest sank, then rose again, and at the same instant the panting of the buck was apparent to his hands. He lay quite still, looking at the steel grey of the sky, and thought clearly. It would not be supper time for another ten minutes; they would not come to look for him for a quarter of an hour after, at the soonest. There was no use in shouting: the windows would be closed; everyone would be inside. Greg was standing still, probably thinking it out too, but there was no indication of his relenting and Ralph could not hold him so forever. He had seen that the deer were fed all winter long; Greg was strong. He remembered the old brute savaging Lecky's dog, and something like a shiver passed along his body. The buck must have felt it, for he wrenched his head so suddenly that Ralph almost lost his slippery hold on the ears. The buck lifted the old man's shoulders inches from the ground; and Ralph clenched his teeth and threw his full weight backward. For an instant he hung poised; then the buck took two shuffling steps forward, Ralph's shoulders touched the earth again, and his breath returned. His arms and fingers ached from the strain of the close grip. He could not keep it up for many minutes.

He wondered where his stick lay. If he could reach it with one hand he might be able to hold the buck off until he had got to his feet and then beat him away until he had reached the gate. By craning his neck he had the good luck to see it; but it lay ten feet off, cocked against a stump, where it had fallen. There was no chance of getting to it.

The buck heaved again, once more lifting Ralph's shoulders, and once more their close, almost motionless struggle was en-

acted; and once more Ralph managed to hold down the smooth head. He pulled the deer forward a step more along his body, and suddenly the hot breath with its odd rank smell of green struck his face, and he saw red.

He had no longer any thought of escape; he would kill the brute. He twisted the head suddenly with all his strength, until one eye was pressed against his chest. The deer staggered, but held his footing; but the old man continued the pressure as his hands felt the pain in the buck's attitude. The animal's breath came in shrill short gasps.

Then Ralph was forced to ease the pressure as he felt his fingers slipping, and the deer's neck straightened. They were silent again, and the sound of the running stream was once more audible.

After the buck's third effort, it was the old man's breath that began whistling. But he now remembered the Barlow knife in his pocket. It had been a present from Parchal, given him at Christmas. He began experimenting with his hands until he found that he could hold the buck's head in place with his left. He reached quickly for the knife and brought it out at the first attempt, but dropped it as Greg tried a fourth time to rear.

When at last he had brought him back he groped for the knife and began attempts to open it. One hand could not do it. He had hardly used it before this and the spring was stiff. He brought it to his mouth, but his teeth found no grip on the blade, and when he took the handle in his teeth, he could only get the blade an eighth of the way open before it slipped from the nail and snapped shut. He tried three times before he decided that he would have to use both hands.

If he let the buck go, he knew that he would have no chance to open it before both hoofs drove through his chest. He must devise some other way to hold down the head.

The buck made tentative efforts to butt him, and as his head came forward Ralph saw his chance. He dropped the knife once more and resumed his two-hand hold of the ears, and when the buck once more tried to butt, he twisted up his head until the damp nose reached within a few inches of his chin.

He put forth his full strength to hold him so, and twisting his head forward and to one side, caught the nose in his teeth, the upper teeth catching in one nostril, the lower in the other; and bit with all his might.

At the pain the fight went out of the deer with a single shuddering breath. He stood as quiet as a ringed cow. It took but an instant. With both hands free, Ralph opened the blade, felt for the jugular with his left hand, thrust in the knife with his right, and brought it through with one stroke.

Greg made no sign that he felt it. For an instant he stood still. Then he made a last convulsive jerk that seemed to tear the old man's head from his neck, and stood still again, his blood pouring out upon Ralph's chest. The deer's breath caught and slobbered through the wound; the nose drooped until it rested on the bright red waistcoat; he came to his knees slowly and with dignity. He toppled, fell upon his side, and, after one kick, lay quiet. It was over.

Ralph's head fell back as his jaws opened, and he lay stretched out on his back, eyes closed, his chest rising and falling. Gradually his breathing became more normal; then it stopped, and a shudder as painful as the buck's went through him. He sat up, and began to wipe his right hand on the earth in slow strokes. Then he took out his handkerchief and began slowly drying his fingers, one by one, wiping the blood away as well as he could.

For several minutes he did not allow himself to look at the deer. Then suddenly he turned to the still body and took the head upon his lap, almost as a woman might have, and began stroking the sleek ears. His gestures were mechanical. There was a bursting in his heart. He was unable to think clearly. . . . Old Greg. Good old Greg. "Poor boy!" He said the words to himself over and over, remembering how he had carried him to the park, how he had fed him winter after winter, this old companion of his that he had had to kill. His eyes began to smart, his own head drooped, his shoulders hunched forward. He felt himself strangling; an agony possessed him; he was all alone. "Poor boy." The sob came out at last.

So Rose found him; led him back to the house; took him

to his room; took off his coat and waistcoat and shirt and undershirt, all stuck together with Greg's blood; washed the thick, smooth chest, and wrists and hands; and took him down and gave him supper herself, so that Parchal would not see him.

He did not want to eat at first; but at last she coaxed him, and afterwards took him to his room and waited outside until he was in bed. Then she went in to blow out the candles; and afterwards, for an hour, sat beside him in the dark, until he went to sleep saying to himself, "Poor boy." An old broken-hearted man.

XV

THE BARN PARTY

1

One afternoon in the middle of July, three years after, Uncle George sat with some men of the village about him. They were men who had been to war. But they had returned during the preceding summers, and their tales were getting stale. They themselves had fallen back into the valley talk: crops, weather, hogs, children, cheese, and a bit of gossip. It was after the haying, and they were, for a few days, having an easy time of it.

For some months, Uncle George had held silence. His old voicing of antique memories had been swept aside. But now there was peace: the war was a thing that had been; it belonged to events gone by, and instantly he had resumed his former authority. He sat upright again, hands on knees, his white beard, pressed against his shirt, the only sign that he was dozing.

From time to time the others let their eyes wander to the letter boxes. The mail had been sorted, but in one pigeonhole two letters remained.

"Wrote out," said a man lazily. "Invites wrote out round."

"I got one, me and the missus, time and place and name, and every word correct."

A third said, "Me too. Handsome."

A faint odor of new hay still clung to their trousers. It was cool and still in the store. Only the door and windows let in dazzling squares of light from the street.

The men let their eyes wander to a dog that lay by the door, just his nose round the jamb, as if he wished to breathe the cool air that hung inside.

"He looks tuckered out. Wonder where he come from."

"He appears hungry."

"I carry an idee he 's that new dog of Lecky's."

But none of them moved to invite the dog in. It seemed cooler in the store when they could look out and see the dog's hot nose.

"The Ninety-Seventh 's been disbanded, ain't it, Mercer?"

"Last week, yeanh."

"Pete and Leo ought to come back pretty quick, maybe to-day."

A man from Boonville, who had been in that regiment, come after cattle, took possession of the talk.

"That was a real outfit of soldiers," he said. "Damned near dedicated twicet." His voice was proud.

"What does that mean?" asked a man from the Thirty-Fifth.

"That 's what the captin called it."

"He means decermited," said Mercer wisely.

"It 's all the same. We was just shot to beans and ribbon."

They turned resentful eyes toward him.

"I was to Gettysburg," he said. "The greatest battle of the war."

He was annoyed to see them turn to the street. A wagon had stopped. Two men climbed down. A sharp voice said, "Keep it up and down, Leo! My God! if you let it get to pulling you sideways that way, you 'll commence to teeter. You 're too big a man to teeter and not set down."

The Boonville native heard a grunt. A man entered swiftly, a little man in a corporal's uniform. Behind him stumped an enormous fat figure. His red face was sweating and little grunts escaped him at each step. On the top of his head a campaign cap bobbled and slipped. He took it off.

"Pete! Leo! Gol! He 's lost a laig!"

They clambered to their feet to shake hands. Then there was silence as they all looked down at Leo's wooden leg. Leo looked down too. "Yeanh," he said.

Then they heard the man from Boonville saying, "Gettysburg; I was wounded there. The biggest battle of the war."

Pete's head jumped with a birdlike motion and he cocked his eyes. But he said nothing.

He had all his old swagger as he walked to his accustomed chair beside Uncle George. "Hello, Uncle George. How be you?"

The old man looked up out of rheumy eyes and said, "Hello, Pete. I mind a time . . ."

"Sure," said Pete.

"Sure," said Uncle George. He looked curiously at Leo's leg. "He 's gone and had it off, ain't he? Does it hurt a lot? Is it painful getting into bed? I 've seen a man lose his head, but never saw one lose his leg. I knowed a man with a wooden leg that did n't have much luck with girls."

Pete chuckled.

"So he got married," said the old man.

Leo started. There was a sweat on his fat cheeks.

"Tell me how he lost it," Uncle George commanded, and rubbed his twisted old hands. Here at last was evidence of war. He could n't move his eyes from the stump.

Pete squared his shoulders, took a glass from Mercer, drank, and threw a glance at the man from Boonville. He snorted. The man from Boonville stiffened.

Pete began, "That leg of Leo's was laid by at Petersburg. One of the nine decisive conflicts of this country!"

A sigh went up from the men. Uncle George's eyes glistened. Here was the challenge laid down before the Boonville man. Pete swept his hand in a wide gesture.

"It was a handsome piece of war, it was. The hull grand army moving down the south. We went through woods, we crossed a river. That there was where Leo laid by his leg."

He shook his head and dropped his voice a note.

"In the afternoon it was." He turned to the Boonville man. "After your time in the old Ninety-Seventh, mister." His politeness was withering. Again he raised his hand. The store was still. Even Mercer had stopped wrapping pills. A coil or two of smoke, from pipes, rose up in slender, unwavering columns.

Pete's voice was low.

"In the afternoon it was, and the hull grand army was moving down out of the hills. Regiment and regiment and regiment and regiment come out of the hills and faced the river. It looked red. And they all stopped a minute and then they commenced to come down, and there was regiments one behind the other, back for miles." He paused. "Way back was the guns and the commissarid trains, but we could n't even hear them rumbling, so far back they was."

He took a sip. "At the lead was the Ninety-Seventh regiment."

A sigh rose.

"Were n't it, Leo?"

"Yeanh," said Leo.

"And at the head of that was our company." And Leo nodded.

"And at the head of the company was our squad." And Leo nodded.

"And at the right-hand head of that was me and Leo marching." His voice rang out.

"Yeanh," said Leo.

"We had meadows on each side, and the road under our shoes, and the river ahead, and the bridge. And back beyond the bridge a company of rebels had come in with a big snarl of cannons to dispute our way!"

"War!" Uncle George said solemnly.

Pete nodded.

"Yeanh," said Leo, and he shifted his weight, and one or two noticed his thick fingers creeping down along his thigh.

Pete swallowed and went on: "It was a sight you 'd ought to 've been there just to see." He bent with a pretense of affableness to the Boonville man. "There was a couple of boys with a drum back of us and we could listen to it bub-bub-bub as we came debouking down into the valley, with me and Leo in front. Bub-bub-bub! And our shoes marching us along. That was all the sound a man could hear, though the hull grand army was in back of us with General Grant."

They might all have seen the general in his old blue shirt,

wiping his beard with the back of his hand and looking down at them.

"We come to the bridge just as the rebels got their station. We could see them unlimbering their guns and pointing us out, me and Leo, right in front."

His fist clenched. "Those dirty rebs let loose right onto us and mowed us down. I could hear the cannonading going past my ears. And I looked back and half the boys was falling down. I thought of falling down myself." Pete hunched his back as if to duck. "Yeanh," said Leo, but Pete did not hear him. "I thought of falling down when a rebel bumb lit right in front of me, and bursted. But I stood still, and right beside of me was Leo, was n't you, Leo?"

"Yeanh," said Leo.

The silence was full of life now, and breathing from the soldiers, and the sibilant whisper of Uncle George combing his beard with one gnarled hand.

"Just then our lieutenant come up. Just a lad, he was, a college lad. 'My God,' he says. 'Those dirty rebs is going to bumb our bridge!' 'I reckon so, lieutenant,' I says. 'We can't stand this fire, Pete, but we 've got to get acrost. The hull darned war depends upon this bridge.' 'I guess that 's so,' says I. He yells, 'Forward!' And I yells back, 'Come on, you lousy pups!' and the old Ninety-Seventh got up out of the dirt and come along." Pete wiped his mouth.

"Then I turned ahead, but our lieutenant was wiped away. So me and Leo steps out on the bridge and commence marching, and back of us the hull grand army got a start. But all them rebel cannon got to going on that bridge, and all to once I could n't hear the others coming, what with the racket of them bursting bumbs, and I looked back and see the bridge was bare, only for a leg, and then my hat got wiped away and I felt kind of dizzy. And I walks back to that leg. And I thinks I 've see that leg afore sometime, but don't remember where. I pick it up and find it very hefty to the hand. It had on a boot and a sock and part of a pant leg. And I walks back just wondering, amongst them bumbs, and I see Leo laying by the road. I says to him, 'This here leg 's familiar to me, Leo.' Did n't I, Leo?"

"Yeanh," said Leo, and he took his stump in his hand and slowly crossed his legs.

"I says, 'Leo, is this your leg?' and the big bezabor, he just sets looking down at himself, and after a while he says, 'Jeepers, Pete, I guess it is!' And then I took hold of the damned thing and run acrost the bridge and throwed it right in amongst those dirty rebels, and the hull grand army come after me yelling to beat the cars, and the munition trains, and eatables, and the cannon, and General Grant; and we went ahead to Petersburg."

"War!" cried Uncle George. "By Grab! That there was war!"

Then all of them were still, while Pete swung his hand around and pointed straight at Leo's leg.

In the silence they heard the Boonville man sniff and hawk and spit.

"Petersburg! Where was Petersburg? I was to Gettysburg, the turning of the tide, where the rebs actually got licked."

"Yeanh?" asked Pete.

The man flushed, "Yeanh. That 's where I got my wound."

"Then you was there, all right," said Pete drily. "But I don't ask you to show the wound to me, because every man knows that any Union army man to get wounded there got shot in the seat of the pants." Pete turned his back.

A great burst of laughter broke out. The man from Boonville flushed and stammered, then wisely held his tongue. In a moment he went out.

Mercer came forward, saying, "Here 's a letter for each one of you."

Pete took them both.

"Invites," said a man. "Invites for Ralph's barn party, like he promised."

Pete read his and then read Leo's, both out loud. Leo listened attentively. "They 're both the same," he said wonderingly.

Pete glanced knowingly at the crowd and touched his head.

"Poor Leo, he don't mean harm. He 's such a unknowledged bezabor."

"Yeanh," said Leo. "Do we wear uniforms?"

No one answered him. The talk fell into local channels at last — the weather, the crops, children, cheese, and the barn party. Leo listened and offered Uncle George a plug from down South.

"No, thanks," said Uncle George.

Leo looked sympathetic.

"Don't you chew no more, Uncle George?"

"No," said the old man, testily.

"I s'pose an old man loses all his teeth when he gets to be like you," and Leo peered at the white whiskers.

"I got plenty left," the old man said indignantly, "but they 're kind of misdirected."

2

A little after midday, Rose came out upon the verandah and stood looking out across the valley. The weather was growing cooler; the air had that almost brittle clearness that properly belongs to fall; the river was bright and sparkling under the touch of the light breeze. She stood easily, her eyes surveying the riverside meadows. Young Samuel should be coming any minute for his pay.

She was wearing a thin flannel dress of soft brown, the rather short skirt showing her high laced boots as far as the ankles. There were fine weather lines at the corners of her eyes when she shaded them against the sun; her cheeks were a darker red, burned in by the wind; she looked much older than the bride who rather timidly had taken her place in this house. Her mouth had changed. It was strong, determined, reticent, almost masculine. Only the dark hair sweeping back to the long twist on her neck remained unchanged.

Three summers had passed since Bascom had left them. They had not heard from him since, not a word. He was down as a deserter; that hurt them all. The old man never spoke of him without breaking forth against such an interpretation of his silence. "He never did write, anyhow." The investigation had revealed nothing. After Bascom had said good-bye to

Joan, he had not been seen again. He might have left from Boonville early in the morning; but it was strange that no one had noticed him. Store gossip had been brought to Ralph by Uncle George. The old man said, "There 's Lecky"; and swayed his beard, with a gnome-like canniness. But Ralph had scoffed, "Him hurt Bascom!" Even after the spring sowing, when Driscoll had sold his farm and moved West, there had been no lines to follow, whatever Ralph might have suspected. He had gone with George to the place while it was empty; but the hopelessness of search was evident, and the old man fell back into his old fatalistic mood. The most puzzling part of all was the disappearance of Juno.

There were times as she worked in the meadows or, more vividly, when she was schooling one of the colts, when Rose would catch herself starting, looking over her shoulder, and then she would almost have a sight of him, coming toward her with his quick long stride, his blue eyes, and the red mouth in his soft beard, and a part of her that kept dull and numb would be quickened by a shaft of pain. Oddly, these moments touched her generally on grey days, when the earth smelled strong and a wind was blowing. Three summers had gone; it did not seem so long.

A new order had settled upon Wilder farm. When Driscoll had moved West, it had been lucky for Ralph and Rose that young Samuel had returned to the village, disabled for army work, but still useful in the fields. He had taken Driscoll's place admirably. Rose had looked out for his wife during her lying-in and had seen afterward that she had help with Samuel's small place, and he had been grateful. Then, a year ago, the Thirty-Fifth regiment had been mustered out; and familiar faces, with a wash of strangeness over the old features, had appeared here and there in the valley. Many of them had come to pay their respects, many with the same friendly feeling Samuel had shown; and there had been no lack of hands. But three of the surviving villagers had been transferred to the Ninety-Seventh — Pete and Leo and Dan.

In April the war had ended. It made small impression at the farm. There the war had not seemed over till the three

had returned, Dan first, to take his old place, with Nance now dividing her time between getting his meals and care of Betty. Samuel had stayed on through the haying. They had had a tremendous stand of it.

And just the other day, Pete and Leo had come to call. Rose had received them on the verandah, brought them whiskey from the sideboard, and they had driven together to the barn, because Leo had lost his left leg just above the knee, and the stump still hurt him when he tried to walk on the wooden peg. The fat man seemed rather pleased than sorry at the loss of the leg. Pete's corporal's stripe could not be transferred to any ordinary coat sleeve, but rain or shine he would have his leg.

The mows were well filled, and the barn had begun to assume a pleasant used aspect, for the cracks between the planks were now stuffed with seed and hay dust and chaff, and the cobwebs on the rafters were generations old.

Standing on the run, Rose had reminded them of the barn party. "I hope you got my invitations."

"Yeanh. How 's Ralph — Mr. Wilder?"

"He 's very well, but he 's sleeping now. He 'll be looking for you at the party."

They had gone away. . . .

At two o'clock she would have to be at the barn, for the party was to-day. She saw Samuel approaching her across the lawn.

"Here you are, Samuel."

He took the money, smiled, and said, "I 've been down to the three-acre lot by the river. There 's a first-rate catch."

"I thought we 'd make a good meadow of it," Rose said.

He grinned. It had been a source of argument between them, but she had overwhelmed his opposition.

"You 'll come to the party, with your wife?"

"Surely."

She watched him go to get his rig and drive home to change his clothes. He had been faithful, a hard worker; she liked him. But it was good to have Dan back. A few afternoons ago they had taken a long walk about the river acreage, planning

their future campaign. She liked going about with Dan. The war had made him older, but it had not changed his reticence. She liked to hear his short quiet sentences. He was an ideal man. Now that she was alone, managing the farm, she liked to feel herself and Dan sharing its problems.

There was no one else to share them with; for Ralph's attention to the farm was sporadic, like a little boy's. She had to pay the bills and handle the accounts. Ralph did not care for the farm work. He preferred to spend his time with his granddaughter. Often and often from one of the fields she would see his broad bent shoulders above the grass as he went slowly toward the river, and hear the voice of her daughter prattling as she struggled along out of sight beside him to go fishing. Rose had had to persevere to make him recall his promise of the barn party. Her pride in the farm which she now ran made her determined that he should fulfill his promise. And the same pride kept her from fixing the date until he had acknowledged the idea as his.

Mrs. Smith had been busy for two days now preparing the feast. They had the cakes and pies ready, the drinks, the roasts; they expected fifty people at least and they would be ready to feed sixty — "full to bursting open" was the stout cook's slogan. Even on the verandah Rose could smell the cooking.

Her eyes shifted to the drive along which she heard footsteps coming. Ralph and Betty were approaching the house; he bent down to hold her hand, she walking aimlessly, looking this way and that, clenching some broken grasses in her other fist. Neither noticed Rose until they faced the problem of the verandah steps.

Ralph looked up guiltily.

"We are n't late," he said defiantly.

His pink cheeks flushed slightly. The only visible sign of change was in the petulance of his lips.

Rose smiled. "Not very." She felt lenient. "But we ought to go down soon."

He let out a long breath and his eyes had a cunning look

as he pushed the child forward and watched her gravely present the crumpled grasses to her mother.

Rose thanked her.

"Hurry now," she said.

3

She and Ralph stood at the south end of the wagon run to receive the guests, many of whom had never entered the barn before. She felt proud of its appearance. On either side, the hay rose above the rails in long smooth ridges, except at the north end where the mow was open for the straw. The air was sweet. Lucy and Joan had spent the morning with Nance in picking masses of goldenrod and purple asters to tie to the uprights. The light from the upper windows crossed in mote-filled beams above their heads. Tables and benches were set all along the south end, and in the wide space in the middle the serving table stood in white, loaded with roasts, and dishes of squash, and beans, and corn, with a row of cool brown jugs at either end, and in between them Parchal in his blacks, brooding solemnly. Beyond him, the run had been swept clean for dancing, and at the far end, on a platform of planks, sat the two fiddlers to supply the music.

The people seemed to come all at once. Already Rose could see the wagons, one behind the other, crossing the great meadow, the people in their Sunday best, the men stiff and silent, the women stiff and talkative. The voices reached her through the still September air.

Rose called for Nance. The old woman came quickly, her scarlet dress vivid against the old green of the meadows beyond the door.

"Where 's Dan, Nance?"

"He went out at noon with Ned. I think he 's got a guest coming."

Rose was nettled. But she smiled. "Very well, please tell him to come here as soon as he comes back."

She wondered if Nance was right. Dan had been preoccu-

pied for the last few days. Once or twice she had felt that he wished to tell her something.

At her side, Ralph grumbled irritably. He was sitting on his chair, his hands folded in his lap, looking rather sulky.

"What is it?"

"Where 's Betty?"

"She has to have her nap."

He grumbled again something she could not catch.

"Never mind, dear. We don't have to stay through it all. Dan can manage things, once they 're started."

Her cool eyes passed over the scene. Everything was right. The older fiddler of the two, old Martin, came wobbling toward her on his erratic legs.

"Shall we begin right off?"

"Yes."

He hurried back and climbed to his place. She heard the first shrill notes of the fiddles, a little out of tune, feeling their way towards her from the other end of the run. The sunlight fell softly on the two ducking heads and flashing bows. The first couple entered. She shook hands.

As if the sound of music had roused him, Ralph got to his feet. His black coat fell open over his red waistcoat. He put back his head, thrust out his big hand.

"Hello, young Samuel. Glad you came."

He seemed a little dazed at first, but his deep voice rumbled heartily, and the two swallows, who had recently brought out their last nestful, twittered in the gable.

He greeted the next couple with more assurance. "Come in. Come in. There 's plenty of food left." He joined their laughter. "How are you, Nathan? Good to see you. Have n't been in before? Eh? It 's quite a barn." He took off his hat and tossed it on his chair. "Yes, you know my daughter-in-law. She 's quite a farmer now. Tells the old man what to do." He chuckled, and Rose smiled. He was standing a little in front of her now, watching eagerly the figures ascending the ramp.

"Pete! You certainly ought to be here. The grain chutes

turned out fine. No trouble with a single one. I 've worked 'em myself."

"They are pretty slick, I guess," said Pete modestly, conscious of the gaze of the others.

"You stay here with me. You helped to build this barn, Pete. Hello, Leo. See you 've had an accident. You ought to mark a foot rule on that leg."

Pete laughed. "That 's right at that. Then he would n't always be going up without no measure."

Leo scratched the back of his head, pushing forward his small hat, and stared down with his puzzled eyes.

"Yeanh," he said, as he mechanically shook hands.

"You stand right here behind me, Leo," said Pete, straightening his collar. "Put that tobaccer out of sight."

"Yeanh," said Leo. Army days were done, thank heaven; he would n't have Pete telling him any more which leg was the left one. By Cripus, he would always know.

His small pursed lips widened, and he smiled by himself in the corner.

4

Rose watched Ralph with Joan moving among the tables. He had forgotten her. He had stopped to speak to Uncle George. His red face shone with delightful excitement. Everywhere she could hear his deep voice booming, drowning out the fiddles. She smiled. It was fine while it lasted. He would soon be tired.

The people were all seated and she had just made up her mind to interview Mrs. Smith about the reserves of food — the whole valley seemed to be there — when she heard a voice at her shoulder, "Mrs. Wilder."

Dan, stiff in a new black coat, was standing beside her, blushing very hard, his green eyes shining. On his arm hung a pretty, plump village girl, whom Rose recognized as Nellie Mercer, the storekeeper's daughter.

"Mrs. Wilder, I brought Nellie without asking you. I hoped

you would n't mind. She 's been writing me while I was away. We 're aiming to get married."

His soft voice stumbled and slurred the words. A slight dew showed on his forehead.

Rose looked at the girl, who returned her gaze with timid grey eyes. A good enough girl, she had heard, nothing much to her, rather pretty. Rose flushed angrily. Dan might have told her, instead of going off this way behind her back. She had pictured herself so often farming it alone with him, and now, if she let him stay, she would know that his heart was occupied by this pretty ruffle of a girl.

Halfway down the run, she heard Ralph laughing.

"Had I ought to tell Mr. Wilder?" Dan asked nervously.

"You can do as you please." Then she regretted her ungraciousness, and gave the girl a smile. How could she get on without Dan? The barn was as much his as it was the old man's. She herself was the interloper, even though from now on its burden would be hers.

"I 'm glad you came, Nellie. We 'll have to have a talk next week about settling you in the cottage."

The girl did not smile, but the color returned to her cheeks. Good heavens, Rose thought, she 's afraid of me! But Dan was saying "Thank you," and his smile was so radiant that she half forgave him on the spot. They moved away together; a pretty couple.

Rose turned her attention to the people.

They were at ease now. The mow was full to the roof of their voices. They sat all along the tables, the older folks eating, telling stories. In the middle Ralph was standing with Uncle George. He looked handsome, upright and robust, almost as she first remembered seeing him, a slight glistening on his cheeks from food and excitement. He was roaring something above the din, and Uncle George was bent toward him gravely, swaying his beard in agreement.

Up in the hay some of the younger people were eating by themselves. Their sweeter voices came floating down. A laugh, lazy and slow, from a boy; a girl's giggle.

The fiddles were playing softly. The food smelled warm

and pleasant. Parchal waited steadily if aimlessly, conscious of the eyes wonderingly following his black figure. Near the jugs, Pete was telling some high and mighty tale of war. Leo in a corner was discovering the insides of a pie and eating slowly, with a placid smile which the backs of his hands could not wipe away. They were all happy, all laughing, all talking. Rose's heart swelled.

Then a hush fell over them; and for an instant the fiddles sounded clear and loud, before they stopped.

Joan was standing by herself. Her calico dress hung loosely from her stiff figure. There was a blankness in her staring eyes and her large mouth looked frightened.

Suddenly Rose heard her sobbing.

She went swiftly to her, and took her arm. It was rigid to her touch. She nodded at Ralph to go on with his talk, and said to Joan, "Come with me."

Joan came almost eagerly. There was no one outside the doors.

"What 's the matter, Joan?"

Joan wiped the tears from her eyes. "I don't know."

"There must have been something."

"I don't know, Rose."

Rose was patient. She waited till the sobbing quieted. Then she suggested their returning.

Joan glanced back into the bright sun-warmed interior of the mow and suddenly her terror returned.

"No, no. I 'll go back to the house. I don't want to go in there."

"Why not?" Rose was amazed. Joan's feeling for the barn had always been almost as keen as Ralph's.

"I don't know. It 's something makes me feel sad. And then I 'm scared. I can feel — something — I don't know, Rose."

"Don't be silly, dear." But Rose felt her breath catching.

Joan seemed bewildered. "All those people. I got afraid."

"Come back now."

"No! No! Rose, it makes me afraid." Again her homely face was convulsed.

"All right," said Rose. She let Joan go. But as she stepped back across the threshold, a slight shiver took her.

The party was going on again. Ralph glanced at her and nodded. She said to Dan, who was waiting for her, "She 'll be all right," and watched him going back to his girl. Rose wanted to be alone. . . .

She went slowly down the stairs, like rabbit holes through the sweet hay, until she stood in the cow stable. The herd had been brought in early for the guests to see. With Dan's support, she had bought a couple of new cows, black and white, Holsteins — from Chenery stock — the best blood. They had the place of honor, supplanting the old Herefords. She stepped in between them and stroked their sleek coats and passed her hand knowingly over their bags. They would be the first stock of the dairy she would make.

She stood quite still in her brown dress, looking a little sad. The noise of the dance came to her dimly through the hay shoots, the fiddle's screech, the stamp of the boots, Ralph's deep voice calling the turn, "L a man left!" Laughter and clapping from the lookers-on. Beside her one of the Holsteins shifted her weight and her bell clinked gently.

Rose passed her hand over her forehead. . . .

Footfalls on the steps roused her. Parchal appeared, his stale eyes searching the shadow for her.

"Here I am. What is it, Parchal?"

He hesitated. "There 's a man at the door, wants to see you, ma'am."

"Who is it?"

He hesitated again. His face looked worried. Then an expression of complete satisfaction came over all of him; he had had an idea.

"He did n't give his name."

"Very well."

She went out of the stable door and climbed the ramp. Before she had gone half way, she saw him, white-haired, thin, with haggard eyes.

"Henry!"

He started, looked at her, came forward unsteadily, like a

man after a long illness. Instinctively she held out her arms; she was half crying, half laughing. He did not say a word, but his head dropped on her shoulder and he sighed.

"Dear," she said. "Dear."

He did not speak, but now and then a tremor seized him.

"Come back to the house," she said suddenly.

She had to help him as they went slowly across the meadow; and though he leaned on her, she felt that she had found a prop.

Dr. Jerry overtook them at the steps, and after a while she had a chance to talk to him alone, and he told her. "He was taken prisoner, he 's been in Libby Prison. They 've had him in a hospital in Baltimore, and they only identified him a week ago. A friend wrote me, and I met him this morning in Rome."

The little man's face was grave. "He 'll be not quite right for quite a while. I doubt if he 'll be able to accomplish much for a year."

He stared sorrowfully at Rose. She had drawn herself up on her chair, full-bosomed, and returned his stare with a slow smile.

"He may be all right by next spring. Let him keep outdoors."

"Yes, he can work in his garden."

"He liked roses, did n't he?" Dr. Jerry said, with an effort.

They looked at each other.

"Of course he 'll come out of it," the little doctor said suddenly, loudly. He pulled out his watch. "But it may take time," he added.

Rose understood.

"I don't care," she said.

He nodded.

XVI

EVENSONG

THE next day had been a quiet one. Rose had spent most of it in Henry's room. The blinds were partly closed and a cool air was drawing into the room.

It was still there. In the hall outside feet passed on tiptoe: Joan's, Nance's going slowly while her voice hushed Betty's chatter, Ralph's, Parchal's. Dr. Jerry came in in the morning.

"Let him sleep."

He was hungry for sleep. He lay thin and still and wasted, never moving, except twice to touch her hand. He had not yet asked to see Betty. It seemed enough for him that he had come home. And Rose let it be enough for her, while she sat there, refusing to acknowledge the steady ache in her heart.

With all the men back again, there was no need of her presence about the farm. But at sunset, while Henry slept peacefully, she went out for a breath of air.

The house was still. All the family were out. She walked slowly to the edge of the meadow. The sunset was pouring a copper light over the cut grass, so that she could see it clearly, in stiff upright spikes which merged to velvet smoothness in the distance.

A trail of smoke mounted from the farmhouse chimney, till the rising sunset wind snatched it and it vanished.

In the pasture lot on the edge of the swamp she saw the white shape of Belle, and Joan talking to her. Joan often went out on these visits, and the two would stand for many minutes quite still, as if they mourned.

The barn's shadow stretched away over the edge of the meadow, the shadow of the gable slowly mounting the highest slope of the bottom land.

Rose's eyes followed the shadow back to the open doors. A speck of red showed there. It must he Ralph. On impulse she started walking toward him.

He had been sitting there in the sunset for half an hour. It was peaceful after his walk, with the dusk coming on. He could see the sunlight little by little deserting the western side of the valley. Shadows were being born, and they were growing; they had swallowed all the village, except the gilt weathervane on the brown church steeple. But his meadows still brimmed with light.

His mind was on the party of the day before. It had been a good party, by George! He had kept his promise. They had had a good time. A sort of reunion for the barn. It had made him feel well to see them all, and the hay all in, and nothing to worry about but the grain. If only Bascom had been there.

He dozed. . . .

When he lifted his head again, Rose was mounting the ramp. There were ruts in it now, from wagons. He nodded to her, and told her to sit down. They kept silence.

Underneath, in the stable, they heard the milking going forward — the sound of a pail set down, the clink of a bell.

"Rose."

"Yes, Father."

"How 's Henry?"

"He 's sleeping now."

"Yes."

A bell clinked again.

"It makes me happy the way you're taking care of the place. One of the boys could n't do it half so well."

She looked down, not speaking, but with a slight flush in her cheek.

He was staring out across the meadow, however, searching for something he wanted to tell her. It was a queer thing. He wanted to say it right.

He began: "I remember how we had to clear this land, moving stones, burning stumps. There was one stone we could n't move nor bury."

His face was smooth, his grey eyes quiet with recollection.

"My wife came down, I remember. She said to leave it. It was a kind of monument. It 's flat and buried deep, about four inches under, so it does n't show in the grass. . . ."

He laid his hands over his knees and hunched himself a trifle forward. His thoughts veered.

"I 'm getting too old now to handle the farm. I 'm turning it over to you. I don't know about these Holstein cattle. That 's for you to make out. I 'm leaving the farm to you and Henry together."

Her heart was aching for him. She knew then that his mind was on Bascom.

"There 's one thing, though. I 've cleared this all myself. It 's the only place I can be in now. I know you and Henry 'll take care of me."

She made no answer but for a slight motion with her hand.

"That rock. It looks over the meadow land. I want to be buried there, Rose. Promise it."

"I promise it," she said.

"You can put a headstone in the graveyard. Betty 'd have understood, I guess."

"Yes."

They sat silently again, the lean wind drawing gently over their faces.

Rose asked after a minute: "If it 's underground, how can we find it?" For the covering of the rock went back before her time.

Ralph pointed.

"You can tell by the shadow. It 'll reach there just before it gets dark."

The shadow was moving away from them with increasing pace as the sun neared the crest of Tug Hill. Ralph sat still, holding his knees in his hands. A sense of repose came from his thick body, a feeling of strength, of richness of years.

"Bury me deep down and don't mark me anyway at all. When it comes time to turn the meadow into corn or barley, plough me over."

He stirred, as if he felt the web of heavy pasture rooting in his heart. His hand touched Rose's. A burst of bell music

sprang from the stable as the cows hurried out to pasture. The rhythm was eager. They listened to it as it faded far down in the pasture, where the herd were separating for the night.

"Dig for me there."

Ralph's hand closed on Rose's. She could see the place now. The shadow of the big barn lay all along the edge of the meadow, the point made by the gable just touching a thin spot in the stubble. The sun had gone down. She nodded.

The dark was coming swiftly. Way back, from the night pasture, the bells of the cows sounded, a little cold collection of odd notes. . . .

If only Bascom were back. He wondered where he was. But he smiled. He felt sure that he would hear from him one day soon.

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

DUE MAR 27 '45

DUE JUL 31 '45

DUE NOV 12 '46

DUE AUG 21 '48

DUE FEB 9 '50

JAN 24 1972

UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG LIBRARY